CHARACTER ORIGINS IN THE ENGLISH FOLK PLAY

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The medieval English folk play has been studied by some of the most highly respected theatre historians of the twentieth century, including such figures as Sir E. K. Chambers, Francis Cornford and Theodore Gaster.[1] These scholars, and others, have formulated their studies on the hypothesis, first articulated by Gilbert Murray,[2] that primitive theatrical performance lay inherent in primitive rite, that it eventually emerged from this rite, whether in Greece, the Near East, or England, and that the early ritualistic element can be observed in the later theatrical product.

Consequently, in their analyses of the English folk plays, the aforementioned scholars have isolated and analyzed basic folk motifs. For example, such men as Chambers, Sharp, Kennedy, and Gaster have established that a fertility invocation, one centering upon death and rebirth, invariably lies

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[1]E. K. Chambers, The Medieval Stage (Oxford, 1903); E. K. Chambers, The English Folk Play (Oxford, 1933); Francis Cornford, The Origins of Attic Comedy (New York, 1961); Theodore Gaster, Thespis: Ritual, Myth and Drama in the Ancient Near East (New York, 1961).

[2]Gilbert Murray, "Excursus on the Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy," in Jane Harrison, Themis (Cambridge, 1912).

at the heart of the English folk dramas.[3] While this ritual act has been isolated, described and defined, the matter of who performs it has been dealt with somewhat less coherently. Indeed, the specific matter of character function and character origins in the English folk play has been given little detailed attention. This is especially true of the folk plays' five stock characters, the Black Man, the Man-Woman, the Hobby Horse, the Doctor, and the Fool. While other characters make their appearance at one point or another in the English folk dramas, these five stock characters appear with unfaltering regularity. In spite of that, their function has remained largely unexamined. It would seem that if the plays themselves are worth attention, their most consistent characters may also warrant study.

The limited scrutiny previously afforded these stock characters may have resulted from the fact that they seem to possess no consistent dramatic function in the folk plays. The Black Man, who derives his name from the fact that his face and sometimes all exposed parts of his body are blackened, not only fails to have a predictable part in the plays, but he even lacks a consistent name. The only uniform pattern that can be ascertained in him is his bizarre

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[3]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 80-227; Cecil J. Sharp, The Sword Dances of Northern England (London, 1951), III, 10, 14; Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert C. MacIlwaine, The Morris Book (London, 1912), I, 10-17; Cecil J. Sharp and George Butterworth, The Morris Book (London, 1913), V, 8-13; Douglas Kennedy, England's Dances (London, 1950), pp. 36-39; Gaster, Thespis, pp. 84-85.

appearance and his ubiquity; indeed, the unpredictability or instability of the role sometimes goes so far as to allow it to merge with another of the stock characters. For instance, at Winton the Black Man gives his darkened face to the Man-Woman, and the two characters become one.[4]

As this may indicate, the Man-Woman character is similarly unpredictable. Possessed of a variety of feminine names and garbed as a woman, the role nonetheless was always played by a man whose voice and gestures could not fail to inform the audience of his dual sexuality. Beyond this androgenic factor, however, little about the role is consistent, and like the Black Man, the Man-Woman's role or contribution has the appearance of being defined separately by the village in which the play was performed. Consequently, the Man-Woman figure was sometimes called "the Queen," and on those occasions the figure comported itself with dignity and reserve.[5] Elsewhere she became the nonsensical "Moll" of the Morris dance or "Bessie" of the sword dance. On these occasions she participated fully in the fooling and funmaking of the ceremony.[6] On another occasion, as at Revesby, it was this character who became the love-object of rival suitors.[7] In

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[4]Cecil J. Sharp and Herbert MacIlwaine, The Morris Book (London, 1924), III, 74.

[5]Ibid., I, 29.

[6]Ibid., III, 89.

[7]Joseph Quincy Adams, Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas (Boston, 1924), pp. 363-64.

short, like the Black Man, the only regularly predictable thing about the Man-Woman was its persistent presence in the folk plays.

Another character who seems to lack functional consistency in the folk dramas is the Hobby Horse. Although his presence could almost always be relied on, both his looks and actions changed considerably in the various plays. On some occasions he took a prominent part in the physical action of the play, while on others he was clearly subordinated. In some instances his costumed appearance was such that it had the physical characteristics of an actual horse, while at other times he was only a character straddling a horse-headed staff, or unadorned staff or broom. The only certain thing about his appearance was that the suggestion of a horse was clearly made. Once this was accomplished, there seems to have been great latitude as to the degree and nature of his participation in the folk play ceremonies.

The remaining two stock characters were assigned somewhat more consistent functions. The Doctor always appeared after the duel and death, to brag comically about his curative powers and, ordinarily, to revive the fallen victim. The Fool, frequently accoutred with a club or other phallus-like appendage, was often used to introduce the other characters of the drama, and usually led the dancing. In addition there were frequent occasions in which he was the sacrificial victim.

Although some functional consistency is apparent in the latter two characters, a review of the extant plays also reveals that they underwent confusing variations. The Doctor, for example, who affords the most predictability as a result of his efforts to revive the dead, was not permitted to succeed in all of the plays. At Escrick, for instance, he attempts the resurrection, fails, and is replaced, alternately, by the Man-Woman and the Fool--both of whom are successful in ministering to the victim.[8] The latter circumstance also indicates an apparent functional contradiction in the character of the Fool, for he does not always act the sacrificial victim, but is sometimes cast in the equally vital role of one responsible for the revival of another victim.[9]

The possibility of assigning some consistent function to the various stock characters is confounded still more by their tendency to coalesce. All of the stock characters had the unsettling capacity to merge with one another more or less indistinguishably. As a consequence, there were occasions on which the Fool had the sooted face of the Black Man, or the bisexuality of the Man-Woman. That type of doubling occurred in almost any combination, and in some instances, triple character mergers occurred. At both Padstow and Winster, for example, the attributes of the Black Man, the

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[8] Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 10, 84. See also pp. 62-63, 90 for added instances.

[9] Ibid.

Man-Woman and the Hobby Horse were shared by a single figure.[10]

At first glance it would appear that the only quality shared by the stock characters was the certainty of their appearance. The degree of their participation--and often its nature as well--seems to have been left to the discretion of the individual village producing the play. It can be said, of course, that the stock characters were introduced in the plays in order to display some crucial characteristic, either visual, as with the Black Man and Man-Woman, or behavioral, as with the Doctor. It should be noted, however, that these characteristics cannot be said to have been the exclusive property of a particular figure. The only consistency discernible is that the traits themselves persist, unaccountably, throughout the English folk play corpus. It is the search for the origins of these characteristics, then, to which the present study is devoted.

The scholarly attention accorded the stock characters of the English folk play has not been characterized by either urgency or conviction. None of the authorities on the folk play provide a consistent, logical explanation of the presence and repeated appearance of the stock folk play characters. Further, attempts to combine scholarly conclusions do not produce consistent, or even very coherent,

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[10] Ibid., III, 74; Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 86-87.

solutions to the problem. For example, while Chambers reports at some length on what is done in the folk phenomena,[11] he seems to consider the repeated appearance of the stock characters an unnecessary, and even arbitrary, intrusion.

> Having got these grotesques, traditional accompaniments of the play, to dispose of somehow, what do the playwrights do with them? The simplest and most primitive method is just to bring them in, to show them to the spectators when the fighting is over.[12]

Beyond this dismissal, Chambers sees the "grotesques" used in only two other ways: to introduce or conclude the plays, and to be given minor parts in the drama itself.[13] Thus, in Chambers' view, the stock characters' import is minimal; moreover, he throws little light upon the reason for their tenacious presence in the plays.

Tiddy's study of the English folk play is similarly inconclusive with respect to these characters. It not only fails to provide a systematic basis for examining the stock characters, but it yields only fragmentary insights into their persistence. For instance, Tiddy tentatively speculates that the darkened face of the Black Man may be a "disguise," and that the Doctor is some sort of primitive medicine man. He does not, however, explore the relationships these characters may have to each other, or to

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[11] Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 116-227.

[12] Ibid., I, 216.

[13] Ibid., I, 216-218.

characters such as the Hobby Horse, the Fool, or the Man-Woman.[14]

In a more recent study, one oriented to the folk dance but concerned with the same characters, Douglas Kennedy agrees with Tiddy that the black face is a "disguise,"[15] and he asserts that the "Hobby Horse is an old pagan character."[16] As in the case of other scholarly works on the subject, however, the Kennedy study fails to define or consider specifically what "pagan" might mean; further, no attempt is made to relate the folk characters to one another systematically. In short, investigations conducted to date have given no concern to the possibility of a coherent pattern of relationships in the frequent appearance of the unusual and ubiquitous folk play "grotesques."

Yet if the "rite-play" is to be understood, it would seem important to attempt to account for, and relate, the traditionally unvarying participants--the makers of the rite. It will consequently be the purpose of this study to identify rite and rite-maker as closely as possible, rather than to treat them in isolation, as has been the tendency in the past.

There is no dearth of procedural precedent for the task. Gilbert Murray found the roots of Greek tragedy in a fertility

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[14]R. J. E. Tiddy, The Mummers' Play (Oxford, 1923), pp. 73-80.

[15]Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 43-44.

[16]Ibid., p. 87.

cult rite; Cornford augmented and extended that thesis to account for comedy, and Gaster discovered its applicability to the drama of the Near East. There seems no reason, then, that a thesis so widely accepted and so frequently useful cannot be put to work in discovering something of the origin and necessity of the English folk play's stock characters.

For the purposes of this study, it should be noted that the word "play" will be used in a somewhat expanded sense to include activities of folk dance as well as drama. The compulsion underlying this procedure is that divisions of these phenomena tend to be somewhat arbitrary, so that it is often difficult to assign either name to a performance without a real slight to the activity ignored. For example, at Revesby, Lincolnshire, the participants in the folk play-dance were known as "The Plow-Boys or Morris Dancers." In the course of their performance, both Morris dance and sword dance were repeated, yet the structure of the whole is sufficiently dramatic for Chambers to discuss it in his "Mummers' Play" chapter, while Adams entitles it "The Revesby Sword Play."[17] The fundamental congruence of the folk activities can also be attested by usage: the actors of what must surely be regarded as a mummers' play by the anthologist were, at Staffordshire, called "guisers." But the same group became, when performing the same activity on the

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[17]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 207; Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, p. 357.

Shropshire border, "Morris Dancers," which fact Chambers advances as "a further proof of the essential identity of the Morris or sword dance with the /mummers'/ play."[18] The folk dance authority, Cecil Sharp, agrees, citing in both play and dance the insistent presence of the stock characters and observing that,

> There is reason to believe that the Mumming play and the Sword dances are no more than survivals of different aspects of the same primitive rite; and the fact that both are often called by the country people 'Morris dances' is, perhaps, evidence that the tradition of this common origin still lingers in the minds of the country people.[19]

Consequently, while differences assuredly do occur in the folk theatre customs mentioned, they are variations which do not seem to alter a common basic ritual pattern. It should therefore be possible to examine the folk play, in the broad sense of that term, and the antecedent fertility cult to discover whether similar practices were in fact shared by both.

The fertility cult rites which may have been the genesis of the folk play appear to have been identified nearly half a century ago by the Oxford anthropologist, Margaret Murray, in her study, The Witch Cult in Western Europe.[20] Murray's evidence that the witches were merely continuing to practice

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[18]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 227.

[19]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 13.

[20]The work was originally issued in 1922.

pre-Christian fertility cult rites had sufficient weight to cause historians and anthropologists alike to pursue seriously the subject of a witch centered fertility cult.[21] Assuming, as these historians and anthropologists do, that the fertility oriented religion of the witches was Christianity's predecessor and rival in England, it follows logically that this is the fertility cult wherein the ritual origins of the English folk play may lie. If so, the neglected folk characters with which this study is concerned may also find their ancestry among the witches.

While there is strong conjectural support for the view that the English folk play made an early appearance, its emergence cannot be confirmed until the fifteenth century.[22] From this time until the eighteenth century, however, the plays continued to be performed widely.[23]

To test the validity of this study's hypothesis, then, fourteenth through seventeenth century records of the witch cult will be explored for evidence of a possible relationship between the cult and the folk plays, the assumption being

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[21]Introduction to Margaret Murray, The Witch Cult in Western Europe (Oxford, 1962), p. 4.

[22]C. M. Gayley, Representative English Comedies (New York, 1926), I, xlii; M. C. Bradbrook, The Rise of the Common Player (Cambridge, 1962), p. 20; Charles Read Baskerville, "Dramatic Aspects of Medieval Folk Festivals in England," Studies in Philology, XVII (1920), p. 43; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 90-91.

[23]After this they were acted less often and in a decreasing number of places, although the tradition has continued unbroken into the twentieth century.

that if the witch cult, when officially suppressed, found expression through the folk plays, it would have shaped that dramatic event in the image of its most important goals and attitudes.

Before pursuing this examination, however, an additional factor must be considered. Many authorities believe that the folk plays actually existed centuries before their presence was recorded, inasmuch as folk art normally antedates the time of its formal recording. In a consideration of the English folk play and its characters, it would scarcely seem wise to ignore the probability that this type of play had an earlier genesis than that established by extant documents. Assuming the folk play did exist prior to the fifteenth century, along with known witch cult practices, some thought must be given to its possible nature, and to whether this unrecorded drama and the early witch cult had as their prime ingredient that same concern with fertility found in the recorded dramatic and cult practices of the fifteenth century.

In the case of the folk play, inferential evidence is of course all that is possible. Nevertheless, two points are worth making. First, in the 600 year recorded history of the English folk play (fifteenth through twentieth centuries), both the fertility oriented action of death and revival and the regular participation of the stock characters remain unvarying features. In view of a six century

record of consistency, it would seem improbable that there was any fundamental change in the fertility orientation of any unrecorded portion of the folk plays' existence.

Assuming that, as in the case of other arts, the folk play did exist prior to the time actual records of its existence were kept, there is a second reason for believing that its action and character was the same as that of the later, recorded events. This is simply that the action and character of the recorded events would, in all probability, have been copies of any existing prototypes. Indeed, this tendency to pattern events on the basis of memory, or to transcribe on the basis of memory, has long been recognized in the development of folk art.[24] Consequently, if folk art was customarily recorded from memory, the English folk play can be presumed to have acquired its fertility focus from previously established patterns. As a result, these plays would have centered upon fertility in whatever period they may have existed.

The early existence and continuing tradition of the witch cult is much easier to establish inasmuch as it can be documented from earlier records. If the folk play can be credited with a sufficiently early origin in England and a consistent focus on fertility, its basic content would

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[24]Until the work of Tiddy and Sharp in the twentieth century, productions of the English folk plays remained largely dependent upon precisely this kind of recollected oral tradition inasmuch as the great bulk of folk dramas had not been previously recorded.

appear to be more than a coincidental parallel to the basic ingredients of the witch cult. Indeed, there is the possibility that the cult served as the founding impulse behind the plays. Thus, the first consideration of this study will be to establish the nature and tenure of the witch cult in England. If these appear to comprise an unbroken tradition of attempts to secure or control fertility, it will be possible not only to study the witch cult for substantiation of existing views concerning the cult origin of folk motifs, but for signs of the elusive and oddly assorted stock characters of the chronologically correspondent English folk play. If these signs exist, it will then be feasible to turn to the texts and traditions of the folk plays and dances to find corroborative evidence that the witch cult and the folk play did indeed share a heritage which, among other things, gave birth to the insistently repeated stock characters found in the folk dramas of England.

CHAPTER II

THE WITCH CULT: ITS SURVIVAL AND NATURE

Since scholars agree that the origins of the English folk play are to be found in fertility religion, and since the only fertility religion identified as indigenous to England was the witch cult, an examination of this cult is indicated. In attempting to determine whether there is a discernible correspondence between the witch cult and the English folk play, two matters must be considered. First, the witch cult's fertility orientation must be demonstrated. Second, an attempt must be made to ascertain whether the witch cult was sufficiently alive at the time the folk play emerged to have influenced that drama significantly.

A continuing record of the witch cult in England does not begin until Christianity was established permanently in the nation, an event that dates to the arrival of Augustine's mission in 597. Previously, England had been afforded a limited introduction to Christianity during the Roman occupation, but relapse to the pagan worship, unhampered by any Christian mission, had been general for five generations by the time Augustine arrived.[1] Records of the centuries

[1]William L. Langner, An Encyclopedia of World History (Cambridge, 1948), p. 166.

immediately following the establishment of Augustine's mission reveal a concerted attempt to secure conversions, "sometimes at physical risk."[2] A clue to the strength and appeal of the cult structure at this time is afforded by the fact that the Augustinian missionary effort was frequently frustrated by lapses to the older faith. The heathen Mercians, for example, overthrew the Roman church in Northumbria in 633, and the area was not even nominally reclaimed by Christianity for a generation.[3] Similarly, although the king of the East Saxons embraced Christianity in 604, his successor lapsed, and the church had no official acceptance in the realm until 654.[4] This capacity to blunt or frustrate the early missionary efforts provides initial testimony to the witch cult's strength, a strength sufficient to have enabled the cult to exert an influence upon any folk drama which may have emerged at this time.

Subsequent records make it plain that the competitive strength and popular appeal of the cult did not wane quickly. For instance, in the Liber Poenitentialis, drawn up in 690, Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, noted offenses to Christianity such as the apparently popular practice of "sacrificing to devils," and he also condemned "celebrating

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[2]J. A. McCulloch, Medieval Faith and Fable (Boston, 1932), p. 15.

[3]Langner, World History, p. 166.

[4]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 20.

feasts in the abominable places of the heathen and offering food there. . . also consuming it."[5] Elsewhere in the tract he was moved to specify,

> If anyone at the kalends of January goes about as a stag or bull; that is, making himself into a wild animal and dressing in the skin of a herd animal, and putting on the heads of beasts, those who in such wise transform themselves into the appearance of a wild animal, penance for three years, because this is devilish.[6]

In the first century of its existence, the Augustinian mission was clearly faced with an entrenched and well developed rival religious tradition.

In the following century, Ecgberht, the first Archbishop of York, like his colleague at Canterbury, found it necessary to condemn offerings to devils. In his Confessionale et Poenitentiale the archbishop formally prohibited

> witchcraft. . . auguries according to the methods of the heathen. . . vows paid, loosed or confirmed at wells, stones or trees. . . the gathering of herbs with any incantations except Christian prayers.[7]

Likewise, eighth century Northumbrian records provide a similar index to the persistence of the cult practices and the strength of their influence. While Northumbria had been officially reclaimed for Christianity by the eighth century, the attraction of existing cult practices was apparently strong, and the priests of that area were forced to proclaim a law designed to keep both the nobility and the commoner

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[5] Ibid., p. 21.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., p. 22.

active in support of the new faith. Specifically, the law stated that

> If anyone then be found that shall henceforth practice any heathenship, either by sacrifice or by 'fyrt', or in any way love witchcraft, or worship idols, if he be a king's thane, let him pay X half-marks; half to Christ, half to the king. We are all to love and worship one God, and strictly hold one Christianity, and totally renounce all heathenship.[8]

Evidence such as this would appear to testify to the fact that in the first two centuries after Augustine's arrival the religious practices of the witch cult continued active.

Further proof of the cult's span of existence and continuity can be derived from surviving ninth century documentation. In fact, the pagan cult remained so dominant in the ninth century that--according to Asser, biographer and friend to King Alfred--that monarch "became king almost against his will, for he did not think that he could withstand the numbers and fierceness of the pagans."[9] In addition to the "numbers" identified with the cult worship, the strength of their pagan beliefs reduced the church to the practice of securing conversions through the aid of warfare and famine.[10] Moreover, ninth century churchmen saw Christianity compromised by its own practitioners. For

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Johannes Menevensis Asserius, De rebus gestis Aelfredi Magni (London, 1866), p. 59.

[10] Ibid., pp. 56-63, 68-70.

instance, records cited by Pearson refer to monks and nuns dancing and masquerading as "wolves, foxes and bears" in the manner deplored by Theodore two centuries earlier.[11] Even by the end of the century, the situation does not seem to have altered significantly. In fact, the laws of Edward and Guthrum specified that,

> If witches or diviners. . . be found anywhere within the land, let them be driven from the country and the people cleansed, or let them totally perish within the country, unless they desist.[12]

In the first three centuries after Augustine's mission, then, Christianity was by its own testimony confronted with a formidable rival religion, one sufficiently entrenched and pervasive to have influenced any emerging folk plays. This religion featured, among other things, sacrificial offerings, ceremonial feasting, mimetic imitation of a variety of animals, reverence for trees, stones and wells, magical incantations and the practice of divination. In addition to suggesting a religious tradition with sufficient scope and popularity to have affected any emerging dramatic tradition, this record reveals other factors pertinent to a study of fertility-centered folk plays.

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[11]Karl Pearson, The Chances of Death (London, 1897), II, 281.

[12]Harry E. Wedeck, A Treasury of Witchcraft (New York, 1966), p. 256, erroneously dates this as eighth century, but it was circa 900; see Murray, Witch Cult, p. 22, and Peter Hunter Blair, An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England (Cambridge, 1962), pp. 78-80.

It seems clear, for example, that even at this early time the witch cult was a fertility religion. Its common practice of "dressing in the skin of a herd animal and putting on the heads of beasts"[13] is plainly reminiscent of fertility rites practiced since the era of cave paintings. Similar nature-centered fertility beliefs are implied in the practitioners' tendency to ascribe supernatural powers to stones and trees. Moreover, a preoccupation with fertility can also be inferred from the witches' "gathering of herbs with. . . incantations,"[14] inasmuch as herbal medicine had been practiced from ancient times. A similar concern with healing may be seen in the veneration of wells, since they, together with other common reflecting surfaces, were believed to possess magical properties in curing illness.[15] In fact, Northumbrian priests, cognizant of these pagan beliefs, forbade "vows paid, loosed or confirmed at wells."[16] In view of the practices which the churchmen sought to prohibit and their significance as fertility rites or symbols, it seems possible to conclude that, in the three centuries immediately following the arrival of Augustine's mission to

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[13]Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, cited in Murray, Witch Cult, p. 21.

[14]Ibid., p. 22.

[15]Paul Christian, The History and Practice of Magic (New York, 1963), I, 274; II, 348; Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, Celtic Heritage (New York, 1961), p. 161.

[16]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 22.

England, the witch cult was alive, openly followed, and directed toward the magical control of fertility. In addition, the kind of fertility control attempted seems to have been broadly aimed to include not only the generation of life, but also its preservation and enhancement.

Since the hypothesis upon which this study is predicated makes it necessary to establish that cult worship was viable until the fifteenth century when the English folk plays' existence can be documented, additional periods must be examined. In this regard, it can be noted that two royal decrees make it apparent that the cult did survive into the tenth century. In 940, for example, King Athelstan revealed something of the powers commonly ascribed to cult practitioners when, "respecting witchcrafts," he decreed that,

> if anyone should be thereby killed and he could not deny it, that he be liable in his life. But if he will deny it, and at the threefold ordeal shall be guilty; that he be cxx days in prison.[17]

Less than twenty years later King Edgar found it necessary to issue an equally prohibitive ecclesiastical canon pertaining to witchcraft, one which stated,

> We enjoin that every priest zealously promote Christianity and totally extinguish every heathenism; and forbid well-worshippings, and necromancies, and divinations, and enchantments, and man worshippings, and the vain practices which are carried on with various spells, and with frithsplots /brushwood areas/ and with elders, and also with various other trees, and with stones, and with many various delusions, with which men do much of what they should

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[17] Ibid.

> not. And we enjoin that every Christian man zealously accustom his children to Christianity, and teach them the Paternoster and the Creed. And we enjoin that on feast days heathen songs and devil's games be abstained from.[18]

King Edgar evidently did not expect that his priests could "totally extinguish every heathenism," or he would scarcely have abjured "that on feast days heathen songs and devil's games be abstained from." Plainly, the old customs were not easily uprooted, and Edgar, tacitly admitting this, aimed rather at eliminating the most embarassing violations of official Christianity, public heathenism on Christian holidays.

During King Ethelred's rule, which bridged the tenth and eleventh centuries, the need for this type of legislation arose once more, and Ethelred found it necessary to urge his subjects to "zealously venerate right Christianity and totally despise every heathenism."[19] The matter of "heathenism" was defined by Ethelred's successor, King Cnut, in the following law which he, in turn, was compelled to enact.

> We earnestly forbid every heathenism; heathenism is, that men worship idols; that is, that they worship heathen gods, and the sun or the moon, fire or rivers, water wells or stones, or forest trees of any kind; or love witchcraft.[20]

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[18]Benjamin Thorpe, Monumenta Ecclesiastica (London, 1840), II, 249.

[19]Ibid., I, 311.

[20]Ibid., I, 379.

The continuation of the Pagan fertility religion's influence in the late eleventh century becomes most apparent when one considers the fact that William II chose for his personal chaplain one Ranulf Flambard, who was not only the son of a witch, but who also was an avowed initiate of the cult. Moreover, much to the discomfiture of the church, Flambard held that influential post for the whole of William's thirteen year reign.[21]

An examination of the twelfth century fails to reveal any decline in the witch cult's traditional activities. In non-clerical writing, the rather loose verse of Sumner's Last Will and Testament reflected the common belief that witches could control weather: "Witches for gold will sell a man a wind, / Which in the corner of a napkin wrapp'd, / Shall blow him safe unto what coast he will."[22] Such a disclosure is in keeping with the fertility orientation of the witch cult, for, in addition to sailing, attempts to manipulate weather conditions have obvious bearing upon both crops and herds.

Of the twelfth century English clerics who were concerned with the problems of cult beliefs and attitudes, John of Salisbury was particularly specific in his charges. In the manner of church figures before him, he condemned "those who

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[21]Hugh Ross Williamson, The Arrow and the Sword (London, 1947), p. 104.

[22]Wedeck, Treasury, p. 154.

practice the evil arts of magic and divination. . . for all these operations or rather sorceries arise from the pestilential familiarity of demons and men."[23] The cleric of Salisbury was also concerned about the great number of people who believed these "magi" able to

> disturb the elements, deprive things of their appearances, foretell the future, upset the minds of men, send sleep and sometimes kill men with the force of their incantations.[24]

Likewise, it was John of Salisbury who reproved the practice of necromancy and asserted that the visions achieved thereby were products of satanic inspiration and control.[25] His description of a cult meeting also reveals how complete the witches' controls over life processes were thought to be. In it he spoke of a

> nocturnal gathering at which feasting and all kinds of riotous exercises take place. Those who attend are punished or rewarded according to their deserts. The same people also believe that children are sacrificed. . . cut up into small pieces and greedily devoured. Subsequently they are vomited up and the presiding deity takes pity on them and returns them to the cradles from which they were snatched.[26]

Evidence such as this indicates that, during the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, witch cult traditions

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[23]Polycraticus, cited in Wedeck, Treasury, p. 257.

[24]Henry Charles Lea, Materials Toward a History of Witchcraft (New York, 1957), I, 127-28.

[25]Ibid., I, 128, 172-73.

[26]Julio Carlos Baroja, The World of the Witches (London and Chicago, 1964), p. 62.

continued to flourish. Sacrificial offerings and ceremonial feasts were still held. Christian condemnation again fell upon "heathenism" and "witchcraft," while veneration of trees, stones and wells was once more castigated together with divination, incantations and "devil's games." Through the agency of these and other ritual objects the witches were credited with a kind of power that could--among other things--regulate weather conditions. The appeal of this to an agricultural community would be hard to overestimate, and, like the cult's curative endeavors through herbal medicine and wells, its attempts to control weather imply a concern with those forces capable of destroying, creating or sustaining life. In the popular mind, of course, the cultists' presumed capacity to restore the dead assumed even greater significance. In short, the fertility orientation of the witch cult appears to have embraced practices which dealt with creating, sustaining and even regenerating life. It is also plain that the witch cult remained vigorous enough in these later centuries to have been a potential influence on any emerging folk play activities.

In the following period, from 1200 to 1500, the witch cult activity also seems to have been active and influential enough to have affected any existent drama. In the thirteenth century, for example, Aquinas mourned that "witchcraft is so enduring that it admits of no remedy by human

operation."[27] That prediction may, indeed, have been well founded since during the period the pagan maypoles remained a common topographical feature of the English countryside. In fact, these fertility symbols were so prominent as to be the first landmark travellers looked for when approaching a village.[28] Moreover, the thirteenth century monarchs John and Henry III--whose successive rules spanned three-quarters of the century--found pagan celebrations and customs openly practiced and apparently ineradicable.[29]

For evidence that the witch cult had not lost strength or altered its emphasis in this later period, one needs only examine accounts of the church's struggle with its adversary. Converts were no longer an openly recognized problem since the country was officially Christian, but the fact that all was not yet theologically united is made evident by the frequent recurrence of what the church called "lapses" or "reversions" to the older faith. The seriousness of this problem is indicated by the fact that on one occasion, during Easter week, a Lanercost priest conducted "rites of Priapus" in which he compelled young girls to engage in dances while he himself carried a pole topped with a large representation of a human phallus. He also danced, sang

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[27] Sententiae, cited in Wedeck, Treasury, p. 10.

[28] A. R. Wright and T. E. Lones, British Calendar Customs: England: Fixed Festivals, January-May (London, 1938), p. 218. Chambers, Medieval Stage, I. 116-18, 180-81.

[29] Baskerville, "Dramatic Aspects," pp. 40-45.

and "incited the spectators to wantonness by mimic actions and shameless speech."[30] Astonishingly, although this priest was summoned before the bishop to account for his actions, he was allowed to retain his benefice.[31] Such behavior was evidently neither so infrequent nor unusual as to furnish grounds for relieving him of his more orthodox responsibilities. Some twenty-one years later an even more highly placed church official was charged with a similar reversion to cult activities. Specifically, in 1300, the Bishop of Coventry was accused before the pope of paying homage to the devil (the usual Christian name for the cult god) by offering a Black Mass and saluting the devil with a posterior kiss.[32] This lapse, unlike the Lanercost cleric's, was considered serious enough to prompt a bull from Pope Boniface VIII.[33]

There are indications, then, that during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries Christianity still had an active and formidable adversary in the witch cult. These indications are given added support by virtue of the fact that efforts to deal with the problem were initiated at the

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[30] Chronicle of Lanercost, cited in Baskerville, "Dramatic Aspects," p. 40. The document was printed in 1282.

[31] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 23.

[32] Ibid.; Robert Graves, The White Goddess (New York, 1961), pp. 440-41. Both Murray and Graves give the date as 1303, but Elliott Rose, A Razor for a Goat (Toronto, 1962), p. 64, cites evidence confirming the earlier year.

[33] Lea, Materials, I, 220.

highest ecclesiastical level. In 1258, for example, Pope Alexander IV issued the first papal bull against the witch cult. Addressed to the Franciscan inquisitors, the bull not only commissioned them to judge cases of witchcraft affecting "the unity or faith of the church," but it also declared witchcraft to be a sect and a heresy.[34] Significantly, that bull was re-issued in 1288 by Pope Nicholas IV, and it formed the authority by which the Bishop of Coventry was brought before Boniface in 1303.[35]

Later in the fourteenth century, Pope John XXII's repeated actions against witchcraft served as proof of its enduring popularity. Moreover, the specific cases with which he became involved reveal much about the nature of the cult and its central emphases. For example, on February 27, 1318, he ordered inquiry made into the activities of several defendants, accusing them of

> necromancy, geomancy, and other magic arts arising from the pestiferous association of men and demons. Using mirrors and images, they have frequently invoked spirits in circles, so that through them they may kill men with the violence of their charms; they have confined spirits in mirrors and rings to inquire into the past and future; they have employed divinations and sorceries, sometimes wickedly using Dianae /succubi/. They have not feared to assert that with a single word they can shorten or prolong life and cure disease. Abandoning their Creator and

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[34]Homer W. Smith, Man and His Gods (Boston, 1952), p. 279; Murray, Witch Cult, p. 23.

[35]Lea, Materials, I. 220.

> relying on the help of demons, whom they serve and to whom they pay divine honors, they adore them with cult and reverence.[36]

On August 22, 1320, Pope John XXII also found it necessary to extend to certain inquisitors

> the power to act against those who sacrifice to demons, or adore them, or pay homage to them, or give them writings, or enter into pact with them, or operate with images to bind them, or invoke demons to perpetrate maleficium, or baptize figurines; also against sorcerers and malefici who use consecrated hosts and other sacraments in their sorceries.[37]

Finally, in 1326 or 1327, his firmest statement appeared. In it, he grieved that,

> many Christians in name. . . sacrifice to demons, adore them, make images, enclose demons in rings, mirrors, vials or other things, seek responses from them, and ask aid to fulfill their depraved desires, offering foul service for the foulest of things. This pestiferous disease, now increasing throughout the world, infects more gravely the Christian flock. By this edict, to be perpetually valid. . . we forbid all baptized Christians. . . under threat of anathema ever to teach or learn these perverse dogmas, or, what is more execrable, ever to use them in any way. We proclaim excommunication ipso facto for those who disobey, and. . . the penalties of heresy.[38]

In view of decrees like this, it is perhaps not surprising that two cases were prosecuted for attempts on John's life by means of cultists' wax figurines.[39] More important is the fact that these charges constitute a tacit admission by the highest Christian authority that the church was still

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[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., I, 221.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid., I, 222-23.

confronted with a formidable rival, one that continued to offer men an ancient pagan opportunity to "fulfill their. . . desires" by ritual means. If earlier testimony established the cult's fertility efforts as directed toward the creation, sustension and even the re-creation of life, it is equally plain that the witches were also thought able to reverse the process and destroy or reverse fertility. Through the sympathetic magic of wax figurines, for example, they attempted the destruction of life, yet at the same time, via necromancy, they were thought to circumvent death. In short, the entire life cycle--birth, life, death and rebirth--seems to have been within the province of cultist fertility activity.

Evidence which would corroborate this was supplied by John XXII's successor, Pope Benedict XII, in 1336, when he authorized procedures against a case of necromancy, and lodged charges of practicing negative magic against an English sorcerer, William Altafox.[40] Evidence that these processes continued to be widely practiced and accepted is seen in a document of Pope Gregory XI who, in 1374, regretted that "many people, including clerics, invoke demons. . . ."[41]

In view of this type of papal action, it is understandable that the fourteenth century saw the first witchcraft trial held within the British Isles, that of Dame Alice Kyteler (1324). The charges filed against Dame Alice and her co-defendants were plainly reminiscent of the prohibitions,

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[40] Ibid., I, 222.

[41] Ibid., I, 223.

practices and beliefs recorded in the centuries following the arrival of the Augustinians. Specifically, Dame Alice was charged with having forsaken Christianity to worship "demons," having made sacrificial offerings to them, and having sought auguries from them. Ceremonial food was discovered in her house, and her coven was said to have made ritualistic use of animal disguises. Dame Alice was further accused of using invocations and magical ingredients to make powders and ointments which could cause love or hate, sickness or death. Moreover, she was charged with using these to cause the death of her first three husbands, as well as the illness of her current spouse.[42]

These charges reveal a pattern very similar to that found in the previous seven centuries. The means by which cultists are believed to wield their power are identical: worship of demons through sacrificial offerings, invocations, ceremonial food and animal miming. The end sought is likewise indistinguishable from the earlier ritual purpose: the acquisition of fertility control. Dame Alice's trial, along with other trials of the period,[43] and the decrees of fourteenth century church authorities make it apparent that during this century the witch cult continued to retain its

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[42]Charles Williams, Witchcraft (New York, 1960), pp. 95-97; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 40, 154.

[43]Charges of attempting ritual murder of Edward II through witchcraft were lodged against John of Nottingham and others in 1325; see Williams, Witchcraft, pp. 97-100.

vitality, appeal and fertility focus in a degree which would have made it capable of serving as a functional blueprint for the emerging folk play characters.

There was apparent proliferation of the cult practices in the fifteenth century also, as trial documents and papal decrees of that period supply additional evidence of the survival of the cult. Henry V, for example, publicly charged that his stepmother, Joan of Navarre, with the aid of a relapse priest, had made attempts on his life through sorcery and necromancy.[44] Some twenty years later (1441), the Duchess of Gloucester, wife to the Regent of England, was charged with having gained the love of her husband by magical means. The Duchess admitted having had images made of offspring she desired so that her barrenness would be cured. She was assisted in this endeavor by Margery Jourdemayn, known as the Witch of Eye, and by several relapsed priests, including Roger Bolinbroke and Canon Thomas Southwell. The prosecution asserted, however, that her objectives were more sinister, claiming that the wax figures were made in the image of the king, and that their purpose was his death.[45] Since one of the positions in the case involved a life-engendering process and the other the destruction of life, it would appear that members of the old religion were still engaged in matters of fertility control.

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[44] Ibid., pp. 102-03.

[45] Ibid., pp. 103-08. Necromancy was also involved.

A similar impression of the witch cult is formed when fifteenth century papal decrees are examined. In the first half of the century, for example, Pope Alexander V, Martin V, and Eugenius IV all complained of "sorcerers, diviners, invokers of demons, /and/ enchanters."[46] In fact, Eugenius later publicly deplored the fact that

> many Christians sacrifice to demons, adore them, seek and accept responses from them, pay homage to them, give written compacts through which by a single word, touch or sign they can perform or take away whatever maleficia they choose, cure diseases, regulate the weather, provoke tempests . . . /and they/ make images by which they constrain demons.[47]

Similarly, in 1451, Nicholas V moved against "diviners"; in 1457, Calixtus III condemned those who practiced invocations, incantations and superstitious conjurations, and. . . magic and wicked arts,"[48] and in 1459, Pius II authorized investigation of "students of magic who seek to predict the future and by incantations cause disease and perpetrate nefarious things."[49] The best known Christian proof of the strength and tenure of these cult practices, however, is the 1484 bull of Innocent VIII which states,

> It has come to our ears that numbers of both sexes do not avoid to have intercourse with demons, Incubi and Succubi; and that by their sorceries, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurations, they suffocate, extinguish, and cause to perish the births of women, the increase of animals, the corn of the ground,

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[46] Lea, Materials, I, 224.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., I, 225.

[49] Ibid.

> the grapes of the vineyard and the fruit of the trees, as well as men, women, flocks, herds, and other various kinds of animals, vines and apple trees, grass, corn, and other fruits of the earth; making and procuring that men and women, flocks and herds and other animals shall suffer and be tormented both from within and without, so that men beget not, nor women conceive; and they impede the conjugal action of men and women.[50]

This variety of documents plainly attests to the fact that the witch cult, with its fertility practices, continued well into the fifteenth century. Moreover, examination reveals that the character of these activities is essentially the same as that noted by England's first archbishops centuries before. Such things as sacrificial offerings, ceremonial food, and animal miming are still being condemned there in the fifteenth century. Similarly, the tree veneration of former periods is seen to continue in the Maypole custom; belief that power can be derived from well-worshipping and mirrors persists; divination is once more condemned; and the tendency to attribute incantatory powers to the witches is still common. By means of these incantations, either directly or through the intervention of spirits, the witch is still believed to have the ability to encourage or prevent human birth, cause illness, manipulate the matters of love and death, or control the weather and thus regulate the productivity of animals and crops.

In conclusion, the documentation cited seems to

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[50]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 24.

establish two things. First, it confirms the unbroken continuity of the witch cult tradition in England from the seventh century to the time of the proliferation of the witch trials in the sixteenth century. It would appear, then, that the witch cult was much alive at the time of the emergence of the fertility-centered English folk play. Consequently, it could have given rise to those plays. Second, the evidence makes plain that, in the period examined, the witches' religion consistently centered upon efforts to control fertility in animals, crops and men. As a result, whether the folk play emerged in the tenth or the fifteenth century, the only extant fertility religion was, by the repeated testimony of its Christian adversary, alive and dominated by the fertility objectives which scholars associate with the English folk dramas. It therefore seems appropriate to examine the witch cult, as it existed in England, for an indication of a relationship between it and the stock characters of those plays.

CHAPTER III

THE STOCK CHARACTERS AND THE CULT GOD

The evidence cited in the foregoing chapter suggests two things. First, paganism survived long enough in England to have been a possible source for the folk plays or their characters, even assuming the plays did not materialize before the fifteenth century. Second, a key factor in the cult's popular acceptance was the fertility engendering potential customarily ascribed to it.

With the survival and nature of the cult established, it is possible to turn to the central problem of this study. Since scholars have agreed the folk play had its roots in fertility ritual, and since the witch cult was the only fertility-centered religion active in England, an examination of the cult should produce some indication of the source of the repetitive folk play stock characters, the Black Man, the Man-Woman, the Hobby Horse, the Doctor, and the Fool.

In examining the witch cult for evidence of those character sources, it would seem logical to consider, first of all, the central figure of the witches' religion--the cult god, commonly identified in Christian records as the devil. A considerable amount of evidence is extant about

this deity, inasmuch as he manifested himself through a variety of local high priest figures. These community priests were viewed as incarnations of the god himself, and, as a result, witch cult initiates, wherever they were located, had a chance to observe the god in his immediate, human manifestation as well as in a variety of disguises. In consequence, when testimony from the trials speaks of the devil feasting or dancing or riding, it is probable that reference was being made to one of these human substitute god-figures, accepted by local cult members as the incarnate deity.

That the devil was the god of the cult and that he exacted the belief, loyalty and veneration naturally due a god-figure is plainly suggested by evidence of the time. For example, in 1575, Danaeus noted that

> The Diuell comaundeth them that they shall acknowledge him for their god, cal vpo him, pray to him, and trust in him. Then doe they all repeate the othe which they haue geuen vnto him; in acknowledging him to be their God.[1]

A similar attitude was reflected in the witchcraft charges lodged against Marion Grant in 1596, charges which stated, "The Deuill quhome thow callis thy god. . . causit the worship him on the kneis as thy lord."[2] More significant, perhaps, is that cult members themselves testified to the

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[1]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 28.

[2]Ibid.

fact that the god, or devil, was the hierarchal figure in the cult. Isobel Gowdie, for instance, reported that, "He maid vs believe that ther was no God besyd him. We get all this power from the Divell, and when we seik it from him, ve call him owr Lord."[3] Similarly, in 1664, Alice Huson said that when the devil "appeared. . . I fell down and did worship him upon my knees,"[4] and another accused witch, "Ellen the wife of Nicholas Greenleife. . . confessed, that when she prayed she prayed to the Devil and not to God,"[5] while Rebecca West, from East Anglia, "confessed that her mother prayed constantly. . . to the devil."[6] In terms of this veneration and allegiance, it is also interesting to note that Robert Griersoun, who apparently kept the North Berwick cult records, stated in 1590, "that he was clarke to all those that were in subjection to the Divels service, bearing the name of witches; that alway hee did take their oathes for their true service to the Divell."[7]

Documents of the period thus make it apparent that the god of the witch cult was known to his initiates as the devil. Aside from that title, however, the local cult god

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[3]Ibid., p. 29.

[4]Matthew Hale, Collection of Modern Relations (London, 1693), p. 58.

[5]John Stearne, Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft (London, 1648), p. 28.

[6]Ibid., p. 38.

[7]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 187.

figures had another and most provocative identification, one which suggests the first link between witch cult and folk play. It may be recalled that one of the ubiquitous and inexplicable characters of the folk play was the Black Man, a character whose face--and sometimes his body as well--were blackened with soot or some other substance. Indeed, the blackening process was so strongly associated with the English folk activities that the name of one of the most popular folk dances, the Morris dance, was thought to have derived from the word Morisco, "Moorish," because of the darkened faces common to both.[8] The relationship between this blackened folk figure and the witch cult is readily suggested, inasmuch as the custom of blackening the face or body is one inseparably associated with the god of the witches. Cult initiates repeatedly refer to their god as the "Man in Black," the "Black-Faced Man," or simply, the "Black Man." Trial testimony, confessions, and other documents record the usage so often that the term can legitimately be viewed as synonymous with the cult god. In the evidence cited by Murray, for instance, the black man is mentioned over 100 times,[9] while Tindall admits his

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[8]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 9-11; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 198-99.

[9]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 50-70, 88-106, 126-47, 240-44.

omnipresence in a chapter entitled "The Man in Black."[10] The following evidence is typical of that which identified the cult god or the devil as the black man.

Charges against Jonet Ker, in 1661, stated that she "mett with the devill at the bough in the liknes of a greavous black man," while, in 1662, Isobel Gowdie described the devil as a "meikle black roch man," and her contemporary, Marie Lamont, said that "the devil was in the likeness of a meikle black man."[11] Eye witness accounts of cult meetings, where the god presided, testify to his blackened appearance on ritual occasions as well. For example, in 1679, Anaple Thomson attended "a metting with the devill. . . where the devil /was/ in the lyknes of ane black man," while in 1673, a Northumberland cult meeting was called by "the devill, in the forme of a little black man and black cloaths."[12] Similarly, Barbara Napier described a 1590 cult gathering where

> the Devill start vp in the pulpett, lyke ane mekill blak man, haifand ane blak buik in his hand, callit on ewerie ane of thame, desyring thame all to be guid serwandis to him and he sould be ane guid maister to thame.[13]

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[10]Gillian Tindall, A Handbook on Witches (New York, 1966), p. 52. Other references to the black man are found in Christina Hole, Witchcraft in England (New York, 1947), pp. 24, 30, 43, 53, 59, 96-97; Jules Michelet, Satanism and Witchcraft (New York, 1962), p. 104; Williams, Witchcraft, pp. 41, 90; 155, 205, 281-84; Lea, Materials, I, 231, 239, 256.

[11]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 37, 38.

[12]Ibid., pp. 39, 134.

[13]Ibid., p. 55.

The Devil's appearance as a Black Man was so usual, in fact, that the association of blackness was sometimes brought to his name. Isobel Gowdie's cult god, for example, was named John, but, as she revealed in 1662, "Som tymis, among owr felwis, we wold be calling him 'Blak Johne' or the lyk."[14] Indeed, the devil sometimes used such a name himself, as when Joan Wallis of Keiston "asked what his [the devil's] name was, and he said his name was Blackeman."[15]

Evidence cited thus far indicates that, in the fertility cult of the witches, the god, the devil and the black man were one and the same. If the fertility-centered cult did give rise to the fertility-centered folk plays, it would be perfectly natural that the god of the former, in his most easily recognizable form, should be incorporated into the latter as a regular, indeed necessary, feature.

The possibility that the cult god served as a source for the folk play's Black Man is further enhanced by the fact that both the god and the play's character possessed a shape-shifting capacity. In this regard, it has already been seen that the person enacting the role of cult god had at least three identities (god, black man and devil), and that he commonly manifested himself to his devotees in a variety of different forms or combinations. Wedeck notes

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[14] Ibid., p. 199.

[15] John Davenport, Witches of Huntingdon (London, 1646), pp. 3-4.

that the neo-Platonic philosophers "had a name for him: Pentamorph--he of the five shapes," adding that by Renaissance times "these were not all identifiable."[16] These five shapes were probably the ones most indicative of the devil's nature since he was reputedly able to adopt any form he wished. Indeed, Murray has discovered more than twenty different forms which the devil was supposedly able to assume.[17] This shape-shifting capacity of the devil may furnish another link to the Black Man of the folk play.

As has been suggested, both the nature and function of the folk play's Black Man were erratic. For one thing, even his identity was not consistently his own; he sometimes retained it, while on occasion it was amalgamated with that of another stock character. At Sleights, for example, he merged with the Man-Woman figure;[18] at Helston, his attributes combined with those of the Hobby Horse;[19] on the Isle of Man, his character conjoined with that of the Doctor,[20] while at Brailes it was the Fool and the Black Man who coalesced.[21] Hence, in the folk plays, the physical

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[16]Wedeck, Treasury, p. 121.

[17]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 290-91; see also Thomas Davidson, Rowan Tree and Red Thread (London, 1949), pp. 64-70, 167-68; Hole, Witchcraft, pp. 55-58.

[18]Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 15.

[19]Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 98.

[20]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 85.

[21]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28.

characteristics of the Black Man--like those of the devil figure--were frequently subject to change. In addition to this kind of variation, the size and dramatic import of the Black Man's role was equally unpredictable. As a consequence, the only unvarying aspect of the character was his regular appearance in the folk plays. The question of why he should appear so consistently, but with such an apparent lack, or variety, of function can be answered if his surprising blackness was something which he derived from the god's manifestation as black man in the witch cult. Moreover, since the Black Man of the folk play, like his counterpart in the witch cult, was able to alter his shape or cause it to merge with the characteristics of other figures, there is added reason to believe the Black Man of the folk play had his origins in the black man of the witch cult.

A second puzzling character in the English folk play is the figure traditionally called the Hobby Horse. This character was represented in four distinct ways, all of which are clearly associated with the horse. For example, the actor playing the role of the Hobby Horse in the Morris dances often had a costume piece about his waist which was a more or less complete replica or disguise of an actual horse, while the actor's own body represented the rider.[22]

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[22]John Matthew Gutch, The Robin Hood Garlands and Ballads (London, 1850), I, 349, reproduces a rendering of such a Hobby Horse, which Chambers, Medieval Stage, I,

In other instances, the device was simpler yet, consisting of an unadorned staff, broom or broomstick which the actor straddled and rode like a horse. In several places, the folk plays make unmistakable the connection between the staff or broom and the horse. At Winster, for example, the Hobby Horse character employed "a real horse's head stuffed with straw, attached to a broomstick," and, like the unadorned staffs, it was "ridden like a nursery hobby horse."[23] Similar devices exhibited themselves in such places as Dorset, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Somerset, Cornwall, Wales, and Lancashire.[24]

The third manifestation of the horse in folk play usage is, in a sense, simplest of all. It consisted of a character getting astride a human "horse." At Kempsford, Gloucestershire, for example, stage directions specify, "Enter Doctor on a man's back."[25] At Longborough, "John Finny brings in one of the mummers and pretends he is a horse."[26] Later in the same play the Doctor rode in on the black-faced Beelzebub and asked for his "horse" to be rubbed down.[27]

195-96, takes to be from the fifteenth century. See also Gutch, Robin Hood, I, 348, 351-54.

[23]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 74-75.

[24]Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 97.

[25]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 251.

[26]Ibid., p. 166.

[27]Ibid., p. 167.

Similarly, at Ampleforth, the Doctor entered "riding on the back of another man" and subsequently requested "some oats for my horse."[28] As a final case in point, in the Great Wolfington folk drama, the "Doctor rides in on one of the others."[29]

In terms of the Hobby Horse characters already described, there is no doubt that these human "horses" were intended to represent, or serve as a reminder of, the animal. The final appearance of the horse phenomenon in the English folk play is also difficult to mistake. In this instance, an actual horse was used, being ridden by one of another of the stock characters. Before the performance at Helston, for example, a procession of the participants traditionally occurred, "headed by two horsemen. . . one of whom was a Black Man."[30] A similar procession at Castleton was led by a king and a Man-Woman queen on horseback, while the procession at Sleights was headed by three horsemen.[31]

The evidence, however, suggests more than the use of an actual horse in the folk drama. In the instances cited, the custom of using an actual horse in the plays also reveals a tendency to associate the qualities of the horse with those

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[28]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 73, 74.

[29]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 229. Other instances are recorded in Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 218; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 57.

[30]Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 98.

[31]Ibid., V, 104; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 125.

of the Black Man and the Man-Woman. Like the Black Man, then, the horse character could be static and retain its traits, or, in performances such as those at Ampleforth, Great Wolford, Longborough, Padstow, and Castleton, it could combine its traits or features with those of other stock figures.[32] Quite obviously, the Hobby Horse had a capacity for shape-shifting similar to that of the other stock folk play characters--a capacity noted earlier in the god of the witches.

It has been shown that four manifestations of the Hobby Horse figure occurred in the English folk play--the Hobby Horse disguise, the broom Hobby Horse, the human substitute, and the actual horse. Each of those manifestations or customs is discernible within the traditions of the witch cult. More particularly, they are directly associated, as were the characteristics of the Black Man, with the characteristics, qualities and rituals of the cult god.

In considering the relationship between the folk play's Hobby Horse and the witch cult god, the first thing to be noted is that, in England, the devil chose to identify himself not with the goat, as elsewhere, but with the horse. Since the horse had been sacred in Britain since prehistoric

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[32]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 229; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 57-58; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 74; Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 86-87; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 103. The most frequent merger of the Hobby Horse is with the Doctor.

times,[33] possibly because that animal was universally associated with death and the belief in a resurrection,[34] it replaced the goat as the animal most nearly central to the rites and the cult god.[35] Consequently, the horse disguise was one employed consistently by that cult figure. For example, Helen Guthrie, reporting on a cult meeting in Forfar, asserted that "the divell wes there present. . . in the shape of ane great horse."[36] Similarly, the devil manifested himself to Elizabeth Stile of Windsor "like an Horse," and to Margaret Nin-Gilbert he "appeared in the likeness of a great black horse."[37] The god-figure's use of the horse disguise also formed part of the charges filed against Margerat Clarke in 1597, charges which asserted, "the Devill thy maister, quhome thow seruis, and quha techis the all this vytchcraft and sorcerie, apperit to the, in the licknes of ane horss. . . ."[38] In consequence of such testimony, it seems plain that the horse disguise

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[33]Williamson, Arrow, pp. 113-14; Lewis Spence, Minor Traditions of British Mythology (London, 1948), p. 134; Graves, White Goddess, pp. 425-26; Rose, Razor, p. 48.

[34]James Frazer, The New Goldon Bough (New York, 1959), pp. 318-19.

[35]Of the god manifesting himself as a goat, Murray states flatly, "This form of disguise. . . does not occur in Great Britain." Murray, Witch Cult, p. 68.

[36]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 69.

[37]Ibid., pp. 47, 208.

[38]Ibid., p. 207.

which regularly appeared in the folk play tradition had a vitally significant analogue in the witch cult.

In addition to the parallel found in the use of the horse disguise, a second folk play Hobby Horse custom--that of substituting a human for the horse--is also found in the witch cult. This folk play device affords a distinct parallel to those instances in cult practice in which the god, or some other member of the coven, rode humans as if they were horses. In 1661, for example, a trial at Forfar charged that Isabell Shirie "was the devill's horse, and that the divill did allwayes ryde upon hir, and that shoe was shoad lyke ane mare, or ane horse."[39] Proceedings in 1673 against Ann Armstrong of Northumbria also testify to the use of a human horse in witch cult activities. The accused "gave information against severall persons who ridd her to severall places where they had conversations with the divell"; subsequently, "the said Anne Forster come with a bridle and bridled her and ridd upon her." The testimony went on to make clear the symbolic transformation involved in the act, noting, "when she light of her back, pulld the bridle of this informer's head, now in the likenesse of a horse; but, when the bridle was taken of, she stood up in her own shape." At the close of the meeting, "when they had done, [they] bridled this informer and the rest of the

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[39] Ibid., p. 103.

horses, and rid home."[40] On another occasion,

> this informant was ridden upon by an inchanted bridle by Michale Aynsley and Margaret his wife. Which inchanted bridle, when they tooke it from her head, she stood upoin her owne proper person.[41]

Such testimony invites the conclusion that the witch cult traditionally employed certain of its members as human "horses" during the ritual ceremony. That act corresponds directly to the folk drama practice of having a human substitute for the Hobby Horse.

Not only do two of the folk play Hobby Horse manifestations, the horse disguise and the horse substitute, appear to be corollaries of basic witch cult practices, but the same seems true in the case of the folk play's use of an actual horse. The connection is suggested by the fact that the cult god often appeared to his followers mounted upon a horse, a practice which Murray summarizes as follows:

> There are a very great number of cases when he /the devil/ appeared riding on a horse. These cases are so numerous as to suggest that the horse was part of the ritual, especially as the riding Devil usually occurred in places where an animal disguise was not used.[42]

Testimony from witnesses corroborates the fact that the incarnate deity was indeed often mounted on horseback. To the Yorkshire witch, Alice Huson, the god "appeared like a

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., pp. 103-04.

[42] Ibid., p. 69.

Black Man upon a Black Horse."[43] In 1597, Andro Man reported that the devil and others, going to a cult gathering, were "rydand on quhyt haikneyes," while to Margaret Nin-Gilbert "the devil appeared. . . . riding on a black horse."[44] Similarly, in 1673, Ann Armstrong insisted the devil arrived for their meeting as a "long black man rideing on a bay galloway."[45]

Records such as these testify to the god's habit of appearing on horseback before his initiates. Since the mounted Black Man of the plays bears a remarkable correspondence to the mounted black man who appeared before the faithful of the witch cult, there would appear to be a third instance in which folk play and fertility cult traditions coincide.

While documents of the period make it clear that the cult god did ride an actual horse in some ceremonies, it is possible that he was not mounted upon an animal in all instances. Indeed, there were circumstances which make it necessary to qualify the assertion that the devil was always mounted upon horseback when so reported. For example, Andro Man, testifying about a cult meeting in 1598, not only asserted that the deity was mounted, but that he also "rydis all the tyme that he is in thair cumpanie, and hes

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[43]Hale, Collection, p. 58.

[44]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 34, 208.

[45]Ibid., p. 34.

carnall deall with thame."[46] The statement itself seems unlikely, and it is made more doubtful in view of the fact that at a typical gathering this cult god was required to conduct the meeting, perform sacrificial rites, join in the feasting, and lead the dancing as well as have sexual intercourse[47]--formidable requirements for a horseback rider. Clearly, some other interpretation of the statement that the devil "rydis all the tyme that he is in thair cumpanie" seems necessary.

The most logical explanation, one patently supported by evidence, is that the broomstick, an object still popularly associated with witches, may have been employed. If so, the fourth and final manifestation of the horse in the folk play tradition, that of the broomstick Hobby Horse character, would also appear to have a parallel in the ritual activities of the fertility religion.

The possibility of equating the horse with the broomstick in witch cult usage is suggested by testimony of initiates themselves. In 1662, for instance, one such initiate, Isobel Gowdie, revealed,

> I had a little horse. . . wild strawes and corno-strawes wilbe horses to ws, an ve put thaim betwist our foot. . . . Quhan we wold ryd, we tak windle-strawes or bean stakes

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[46] Ibid., p. 242.

[47] Ibid., pp. 124-85; Holo, Witchcraft, pp. 20-33, 85-97. These sources establish the customary presence at cult meetings of such elements as dancing, feasting, sacrifice, instruction, sexual congress and other activities.

> and put them betwixt owr foot. . . . All the coven did. . . read on an horse quhich ve vold mak of a straw or beein stalk.[48]

Similarly, Christen Michell and Bessie Thom were accused of participating in a cult meeting "vnder the conduct of Sathan" where everyone dansit a devilische danse, rydand on treis, be a lang space."[49] The riding of these "bean-stakes" hobby horsesseems also to have had ritual significance. Through the offices of their hobby horses, the witches believed themselves able, among other things, to control weather or destroy their enemies' lands.[50] As Gardner put it,

> In early trials, witnesses speak of seeing the accused riding on poles or brooms across the fields. . . and this was often accepted as the evidence that they were practising fertility magic, which became a penal offense.[51]

Significant as this may be, the cult hobby horse rites contain another, more sexual association with fertility. Specifically, it inheres in the fact that one of the witches' staffs, preserved in the Castletown Museum in

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[48]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 105-06. "Windle-strawes" were long shafts of a wild species of grass, dried, and when bound together, usable as a broom.

[49]Ibid., p. 110. "Treis," or "trees," would be here understood in the medieval and Elizabethan sense of "a length of wood."

[50]Lea, Materials, I, 267-68, 274; see also Montague Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft (New York, 1927), p. 89.

[51]Gerald B. Gardner, Witchcraft Today (New York, 1955), p. 35. Gardner also mentions a fertility charm practiced today by English cultists claiming descent from witch forbears. The rite is directed toward encouraging crops and "is performed by riding on a pole, or broom, as a hobby horse."

England, is described as "a pole for riding, the head being carved in the shape of a phallus."[52] On the basis of such evidence, it is possible to assert that the witch cult made a significant ritualistic use of the same kind of broomstick Hobby Horse as was commonly employed in the folk play.

Thus, it becomes apparent that all four manifestations of the horse--the animal itself, the horse disguise, the broomstick hobby horse and the human substitute--appeared in and were ritually exploited both by the English folk play and by the fertility cult which may have been responsible for the play's origins. An examination of the hobby horse phenomenon in the witch cult would not be complete, however, without considering whether the cult's hobby horse, like that of the folk play, possessed the shape-shifting characteristic typical of the cult god.

Such a trait can be discerned when the customs surrounding the witches' use of the staff hobby horse are considered. Not only were these staffs or brooms straddled and ridden like horses, but they were also often anointed with a specially concocted ointment, this being smeared on the rider's face and body as well.[53] One ingredient for this

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[52] Ibid.

[53] Scholars agree that through this magical material the witches supposed themselves able to fly through the air, for ointment recipes invariably include drugs capable of absorption into the system through either pores or breaks in the skin, and, once absorbed, providing the user with the illusion of flight. The phenomenon could have constituted a

ointment--soot--is of particular importance since it physically associated the witch with two crucial aspects of her deity, his black appearance and his magically endowed animal, the horse.

This kind of coalescence appears at least as far back as the earliest witch trial in the British Isles, that of Dame Alice Kyteler. In 1324, she and her associates were accused of sacrificing nine roosters to the local cult god, whom they called "Robin" and who was described in the charges as "aethiopis," Negro. As Gardner points out, "It would be very unusual to find a Negro with an English name in Ireland at that time, so I presume that Robin mixed soot with his protective ointment."[54] This presumption is strengthened by records of a discovery made by local authorities who,

> in rifleing the closet of the ladie /Dame Alice/ . . . found a pype of oyntment, wherewith she greased a staffe, upon the which she ambled and galloped through thick and thin, where and in what maner she listed.[55]

More than two and a half centuries later the components of

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most convincing demonstration of the hobby horse god's power. See Lea, Materials, II, 489, 505, 546; Kurt Seligmann, The History of Magic (New York, 1948), p. 245; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 100-05, 164, 279-80; Gardner, Witchcraft Today, pp. 53-54, 97-98, 111; Williams, Witchcraft, p. 159; Sayed Idries Shah, Oriental Magic (New York, 1957), p. 31; Rose, Razor, pp. 142-45; Baroja, World, pp. 107-08, 239, 254.

[54]Gardner, Witchcraft Today, p. 98; see also Hole, Witchcraft, p. 28.

[55]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 104.

the witches' ointment had become well enough known to be included in Reginald Scot's sixteenth century treatise, Discoverie of Witchcraft. In it, he lists "soote" among the ingredients.[56]

The hobby horse of the witch cult would thus appear to be closely linked with the blackening process, and both seem intrinsic parts of an effort to identify the participating cult member as nearly as possible with divine attributes. The fact that the cult god's manifestations as horse and black man tend to merge or coalesce once more reflects the shape-shifting capacities that traditionally characterized him.

The significance and function of the hobby horse in cult ritual and practice furnishes additional evidence of clear parallels between the witch cult and the folk play. In both traditions, horse disguises were employed, the staff or broom was straddled and ridden, actual horses appeared, and humans enacted the role of the horse to transport their fellows. Additionally, the association of the black man with the hobby horse is apparent in both cult and play traditions. The witches' staffs and bodies were anointed with a blackening ointment so that figure and vehicle tended to meld in the context of color association

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[56]Reginald Scot, Discoverie of Witchcraft (London, 1584), pp. 41, 184. Later authorities concur in the import and universality of soot or some other blackening ingredient as a component of the witches' ointments. See Lea, Materials, II, 499; Rose, Razor, p. 143; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 100, 279; Baroja, World, p. 239.

long attached to the cult deity. Correspondingly, as at Longborough, Padstow and Helston, attributes of the plays' Black Man character merged with those of the Hobby Horse.

Not only do the most dramatically prominent features of the folk play's Black Man and Hobby Horse have analogues in the witch cult god, but a third folk play stock character, the Man-Woman, may have origins in that deity as well. Unlike the character's professional Elizabethan counterparts, however, no effort was made to disguise the sexual duality of the Man-Woman. Indeed, quite the reverse was true and it was made plainly apparent to all that both the male and female traits were present. For instance, the actor's normal speaking voice was traditionally maintained, while, at places like Ilmington, stage directions specified that the Man-Woman character, Molly, should fall down, "showing her breeches under her petticoat."[57] The androgynous characteristics of the folk play's Man-Woman character were perhaps most plainly demonstrated, however, at Abbots-Bromley. There, the Man-Woman (Maid Marion), was of course a man dressed as a woman. Before the performance, that figure took prominent part in a processional which wound through the entire village. For the whole of this procession, Maid Marion carried on display two wooden replicas of the male and female genital organs.[58] The

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[57]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 228.

[58]Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 89-90.

bisexuality of the Man-Woman figure is revealed in a different, but equally explicit, fashion in the Cropwell Plough Monday play. This folk drama clearly demonstrates that the Man-Woman character possessed not only the physical endowments, but also the physical ability, to be sexually operative in either a masculine or feminine capacity. Normally, any masculine sexual advances in the folk plays were addressed to the Man-Woman character, since this was the only "female" available. In the Cropwell drama, however, the Man-Woman (Dame Jane) had a scene with the Fool in which "Dame Jane tries to father a child on Tom Fool."[59]

Unquestionably, then, the Man-Woman character in the folk plays was openly and consistently presented as double-sexed. This being the case, it is easy to find a counterpart to the folk character in the cult god of the witches. Since the central figure in the cult was a fertility god, it might be expected that sex rites featuring his participation would be a common part of the ritual.[60] Significantly, however, the devil exploited his shape-shifting prowess within these sex rites so that he became, by turn, man or woman as the sexual need arose. Indeed, in a fashion that recalls the folk play's Man-Woman character, he sometimes

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[59]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209-10.

[60]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 173-85; see also R. E. L. Masters, Eros and Evil: The Sexual Psychopathology of Witchcraft (New York, 1966).

presided at cult meetings while wearing women's clothing.[61] This parallel with the folk play is strengthened by virtue of the fact that no secret was made of the devil's androgyny. Indeed, inquisitors and demonologists continually brought up the question in their treatises on witchcraft. For example, in his sixteenth century Pneumalogie, Sebastian Michaelis spoke of the cult god's practice of assuming any human form in order to have intercourse with either men or women.[62] Some idea of the commonness of this attitude may be gained from the fact that even Aquinas concurred in it, as did Jean Bodin in his treatise on witchcraft in 1581.[63] Even the Renaissance physician, Dr. Johann Weyer, known for his dissenting views on much that was credited to witches, gave currency to the debate upon the devil's androgynous capacities.[64] As Masters put it, "The whole of witchcraft is permeated with bisexual phantasies" in which the devil or his agents

> may assume either male or female forms; sex changes of humans are often noted; there are sex-reversing drugs; and devils are frequently represented as hermaphrodites, with both male and female sex characteristics or organs, or with female bodies, save for the penis.[65]

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[61] Masters, Eros, p. 26.

[62] Lea, Materials, II, 576.

[63] Ibid., II, 562; see also ibid., II, 550, 553; Baroja, World, p. 91.

[64] Lea, Materials, II, 513.

[65] Masters, Eros, p. 24.

Consequently, it is not surprising that records indicate there were times when the cult god plainly manifested himself to his followers as a woman. In 1662, for instance, Marjorie Ritchie "willingly and friely declared that the divill appeired to her thrie severall tymes in the similitud of a womane."[66] In Ayrshire fifty years earlier, Patrick Lowrie and Jonet Hunter "att Hallowevin assemblit thame selffis vpon Lowdon hill, quhair thair appeirit to thame ane devillische Spreit, in liknes of ane woman."[67] The cult god appeared similarly to Alison Peirson in 1588, to Ann Chattox in 1613, to Joan Willimott in 1618, to William Barton about 1655, and to Jean Weir in 1670.[68]

The control exercised by the cult deity over his own sexual nature was, of course, in accord with his symbolic role in that pagan fertility religion.[69] In view of that

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[66]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 46.

[67]Ibid., p. 45.

[68]Ibid., pp. 44-47.

[69]Hermaphroditic deities seem universal, appearing among the ancient Greeks, Babylonians, Minoans, Etruscans and others, and surviving in the twentieth century among the African Zulu, Cuna Indian, Haitian Voodoo cultes des mortes, and in the Tierra del Fuego. See Robert Briffault, The Mothers: The Matriarchal Theory of Social Origins (New York, 1963), pp. 275-76, 372, 382; Christian, History and Practice of Magic, II, 457; Clyde Keeler, Secrets of the Cuna Earth Mother (New York, 1960), pp. 51-58, 228-29; Charles Godfrey Leland, Etruscan Magic and Occult Remedies (New York, 1963), p. 139; W. B. Seabrook, The Magic Island (New York, 1929), p. 84, photograph and caption opposite p. 310. Probably the best single source is Marie Delcourt, Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity (London, 1961). Graves, White Goddess,

role or function, his androgyny would seem to have afforded the kind of precedent which a drama patterned on cult beliefs and practices would not have been apt to ignore. That being the case, there would be a cult-centered raison d'être for the folk play's bisexual Man-Woman character, and its appearance would be purposive, rather than one to be dismissed as chance deviation of the rustic libido.

In considering the Man-Woman character, two other possible relationships to the witch cult god become apparent. First, the Man-Woman actor, when cast in the role of the Queen, as in the plays at Brailes and Winster, became one of the rare serious characters in the folk play tradition. In the latter village,

> The King and Queen took themselves very seriously and were so taken by the dancers, the extra characters and the spectators. They behaved with the utmost propriety, quietly and with dignity.[70]

It is difficult to explain why the Man-Woman should have comported herself with this kind of reserve and have been accorded such respect unless the character represented originally one aspect of the witch cult god. In that case, the elevated station and the dignity and esteem given the character would have been entirely appropriate.

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p. 519, notes that even the basic Christian tenet of the virgin birth can be viewed as androgynous. In Britain, the ancient Celts dressed boys as girls and the reverse at winter calends, and man-woman reversals are still common in Scotland at new year; see Rees, Celtic Heritage, pp. 89-90; Tindall, Handbook, p. 57.

[70]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 29; III, 73-74.

In addition to the relationship to the cult deity which the sometimes dignified composure of the character suggests, a further counterpart to the god's nature can be found in the Man-Woman. This inheres in the frequency with which the folk character changed appearance and merged with other folk characters. At Brackley, for instance, the Man-Woman and the Fool were joined in one character; at Winster, the Black Man merged with the bisexual figure, while at Castleton, the Man-Woman and the Hobby Horse combined.[71] At such places as Haxby and Askham Richard, the Man-Woman and the Doctor not only merged, but the resultant character was able to effect the resurrection of a "slain" combatant.[72] In Northumbria, on the other hand, the Man-Woman figure was itself the sacrificial victim.[73] Finally, at Longborough, a character who was called, and functioned as, "the Doctor's horse," also had a blackened face, and in addition, was dressed in a woman's skirts. That, of course, clearly represents a conjunction of the Black Man, Hobby Horse and Man-Woman characters.[74]

In short, there is little that the witch cult god is credited with that the Man-Woman did not, in some fashion, duplicate within the framework of the folk play. Not only

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[71]Ibid., III, 74, 89; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 103.

[72]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 84, 90.

[73]Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 75.

[74]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 180.

was she indistinguishably merged with the Hobby Horse and the Black Man, but she had sacrificial status and could herself resurrect the dead. In addition, she altered her shape in a variety of ways, and was inevitably the object or perpetrator of any sexual advances that were made. Lastly, the figure had plainly apparent bisexual characteristics. Assuming the folk play's natal debt to the English fertility religion, and the possible impulse to retain the cult god's powers and characteristics in the emerging drama, it would stand to reason that the dramatic form would contain elements designed to present the most important attributes of the god to folk audiences. The androgynous Man-Woman character of the plays seems unmistakably to have served that function.

The evidence cited thus far indicates that three of the folk plays' most puzzling and tenacious stock characters, the Black Man, the Hobby Horse and the Man-Woman, appear to have a ritual ancestor within the traditions of the witch cult and its central deity. The same also may be true of another character, the Doctor. In the folk plays, it will be remembered, the Doctor is the stock character to whom a recognizable ritual act was most consistently assigned. At the death of one or more characters, he was called in to bring the slain back to life, an effort in which he was usually successful. If cult ancestry is to be assigned the Doctor, then, it would seem needful to discover within cult

ranks a figure capable of effecting control over physical debility and even death.

A search for that figure again uncovers the devil, the god of the cult, who possessed the virtues in question. As has been indicated, the devil's ability to manifest himself as black man, horse and man-woman seems to have had a distinctive ceremonial meaning to the believer. The cult god's power was not, however, limited to a ritualistic one. Indeed, accounts of the faithful would indicate they also accepted as fact the god's ability to control the affairs of man in physical or practical ways, as was partly suggested in discussing the cult's reputation for fertility control.

Regarding this matter of fertility control, Christian records are again heavily prejudicial. The cult and its god are again and again condemned for causing disease and destroying fertility, whether in animals, men or crops. The possibility of this sort of negative control quite naturally, of course, suggests that a converse, positive power may also have been attributed to the god. That potential is indicated in the witches' reputation as midwives, where their ministrations seem to have been both beneficial and widespread,[75] while records of the god's diagnostic and curative powers are similarly plentiful.

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[75]Hole, Witchcraft, p. 43; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 170-71.

That the devil nurtured his image as physician, and that the witches learned their healing arts from him, seems clear from the evidence. For instance, in 1649, Manie Haliburton of Dirlton admitted that when her daughter was ill, "came the Devill, in licknes of a man, to hir hous, calling himselff a phisition."[76] The same year, in East Lothian, Sandie Hunter was having only moderate success in his attempts to work cures until, as the charges read, the devil figure

> came to him in the form of a Mediciner, and said, Sandie, you have too long followed my trade and never acknowledged me for your Master. You must now take on with me, and be my servant, and I will make you more perfect in your Calling. . . . After this, he grew very famous throw the Countrey, for his Charming and cureing of diseases in Men and Beasts.[77]

Similarly, in 1588, Alison Peirson "wes conuict of the vsing of Sorcerie and Witchcraft. . . of the Dewill. . . quha sche affermit wes ane grit scoller and doctor of medicin."[78] Likewise, Jonet Rendall was accused of gaining her medical prowess by praying to Walliman, the cult deity she revered. In its specifics, the charge noted,

> ye hailled the hors be praying to your Walliman . . . thair is nather man nor beast sick that. . . ye ar not able to cur it be praying to your Walliman.[79]

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[76]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 36.

[77]Ibid., pp. 195-96.

[78]Ibid., p. 35.

[79]Ibid., pp. 30-31.

In 1590, after puzzling over a case an exercising her skills to no avail, the midwife Agnes Sampson was accused of having called upon the devil's diagnostic powers. In securing her conviction, it was argued that

> sche was send for to haill the aul Lady Edmestoune, quhene sche lay seik, befoir the said Agnes departit, sche tault to the gentilwemone, that sche sould tell thame that nycht quhidder the Lady wald haill or nocht. . . . Sche passit to the gairdin to devyise vpon hir prayer, on quhat tyme sche chargeit the Dewill. . . to cum and speik to hir. . . /the devil arrived/ and sche demandit, Quhidder the lady wald leif or nocht. He said, 'Hir dayes war gane.'[80]

Margaret Clarke, another well-known midwife, was also purported to have held active consultation with her devil, and, significantly, on one of these occasions it was charged that he appeared "in licknes of ane horss. . . . with quhome thow was thane consultand, and quhais directiounis than thow was taikand."[81] Alexander Hamilton's devil was said to have given him a hobby horse or staff to facilitate medical consultations. In the words of that account,

> haifing ane battoun of fir in his hand the devill than gave the said Alexr command to tak that battoun quhan evir he had ado with him and thairwt to strek thruse upone the ground and to nhairge him to ruse up. . . . Hamilton coming to the said Thomas Homes house and seeing him visseit with the said seiknes. . . promeist to cure him. . . with his said battoun /Hamilton/ raisit Sathan his maister quha. . . thair instructit him be quhat meanis he sould cure the said Thomas.[82]

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[80] Ibid., p. 206.

[81] Ibid., p. 207

[82] Ibid., p. 207-08.

Apparently a fair number of the witch remedies were credited with success, as was indicated by James Mason, one of their adversaries. In his 1612 Anatomie of Sorcerie, Mason admitted that witches could often cure diseases which confounded the recognized physicians of the day. He ascribed the witches' success to the devil's superior experience in such matters, and went on to state,

> I am perswaded that this kinde of wickedness. . . was never more practised amongst us, especially for recouery of health. For many, I might say most men now a daies, if God doo not restore them to health when and how they think good, they will leaue God's ordinarie meanes by physicke and will goe to sorcerers.[83]

Such evidence makes clear that the witches were generally credited with curative powers, and that their instructor in these matters was once again the cult god, acting as "phisition."

In addition to the medical ability witches were said to possess, they were commonly thought to have, through their god, life-restorative powers. Such an attitude may be found, for example, in the ecclesiastical writings of Burchard, an eleventh century bishop, who condemned even then the belief that witches could

> without arms slay men, baptized and redeemed with Christ's blood, and eat their cooked flesh and replace their hearts with straw or wood or other things and then revive them and give them further life.[84]

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[83]Lea, Materials, III, 1311.

[84]Ibid., I, 185.

More than a century later, John of Salisbury reflected much the same conviction, deploring the fact that people still credited the deity of the witches with resurrective powers. His complaint noted that

> People also believe that children are sacrificed . . . being cut up into small pieces and greedily devoured. Subsequently, they are vomited up and the presiding deity takes pity on them and returns them to the cradle from which they were snatched.[85]

The belief in the cult god's control over life and death went so far as to embrace the notion that he was able to sacrifice himself, commonly by fire, and then revive himself in time to dismiss the meeting that had been climaxed by his own death.[86] That the central cult figure should obtain credit for such direct power over death is of course entirely consistent with his role as fertility god. As such he could give life, enhance it, diminish or remove it, and restore it.

Significantly, this belief in the devil's resurrective powers persisted as late as the seventeenth century. For example, in 1653, Sir Robert Filmer published an Advertisement to the Jurymen of England Touching Witches, in which he noted the devil's ability to predict the future and

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[85] Polycraticus, cited in Baroja, World, p. 62.

[86] Lea, Materials, II, 559; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 159-60; Baroja, World, pp. 207-08.

revive the dead.[87] The belief lingered, and in London in 1669, the question was still lively enough to provoke a tract by John Wagstaffe which set forth a firm denial of the alleged Satanic talent.[88] The following year Wagstaffe's tract was put into a second edition, only to be countered four years later by Richard Boulton's A Compleat History of Magick, Sorcery and Witchcraft which took a positive position in regard to the devil's capacity to restore the dead to life.[89]

The witch god's role of healer, combined with his purported control over death and resurrection, would seem to provide a functional link to the fourth folk play character--the Doctor. In addition, a further similarity between the cult god and the character of the Doctor should be noted. Not only did the Doctor appear as healer and conqueror of death in a manner reminiscent of the witch deity, but like the other stock characters, he shared the cult god's ability to transform or combine himself with other personages. The Doctor merged, in one village or another, with each of the other four stock characters.[90] In fact, at Longborough, he went through a multiple merging process, one in which the

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[87]Lea, Materials, III, 1315.

[88]Ibid.; Baroja, World, pp. 207-08.

[89]Lea, Materials, III, 1314-15, 1321.

[90]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, pp. 180, 229; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 57-58, 85, 212-13; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 74; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 213.

black-faced Doctor was dressed in woman's skirts and rode a Hobby Horse.[91] Having thus exhibited the shape-shifting quality of the fertility cult god, along with his restorative powers and control over death, the Doctor would appear to be as much a folk play counterpart of that god as the Black Man, Hobby Horse or Man-Woman.

So far it has been possible to demonstrate that the dramatically definitive attributes of four of the folk plays' stock characters correspond to major characteristics of the witch cult god. These parallels suggest that the fifth and last stock character, the Fool, may also have had his origins in the functional characteristics and powers of that deity. Such a relationship has already suggested itself in the merger of the Fool with the other stock characters--the Black Man, the Doctor, or the Man-Woman.[92] Sharp's description of the Fool's coalescence with the Man-Woman at Brackley serves as a case in point.

> He was always known as the Fool, although from the dress. . . he might have been the Moll. . . the man-woman who under various designations. . . invariably accompanies the sword dancers. In the Brackley Fool, these two characters appear to be merged.[93]

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[91]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 180; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 57-58.

[92]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 197, 209-10, 213; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28; III, 89.

[93]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 89.

Since the Fool did share the shape-shifting capacity common both to the other stock characters and to the cult god, a logical question is whether or not he possessed additional attributes of the witch god. To consider that possibility, it is first necessary to indicate the Fool's customary activities within the folk play corpus. In this respect, two of the Fool's characteristics are significant. First, in both the Morris dance and the sword play, regardless of how limited or extensive his dramatic contribution may have been, the Fool was traditionally the leader of the dancing.[94] Indeed, his contribution in this capacity was so marked it led Sharp to the conclusion that the Fool is the "semi-divine leader" of that activity.[95]

In addition to his function as dance leader, the Fool made a second prominent contribution to the folk play tradition. This derives from the fact that, far more than any other figure, it was the Fool who was the sacrificial victim in the sword plays. For example, at Revesby, Escrick, Handsworth, Askham Richard, Haxby, Grenoside, Bassingham, Sleights, and in Northumbria, he is known to have served that function.[96] In each place, of course, he was

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[94]Ibid., I, 12-13; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 69-70; Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 93.

[95]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 12.

[96]Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, pp. 360-61; Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 63-64, 75; Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 26; III, 10, 31, 46, 84, 90; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 235.

resurrected, usually by the Doctor. Any attempt to trace the ancestry of the Fool to the witch cult must therefore take into account these two signal functions--he led the dancing, and he was also prominent as the sacrificial figure.

It seems apparent that his role as sacrificial character is immediately traceable to the cult god. In the previous evidence pertaining to the fertility nature of the cult, the god's sacrificial role, together with his startling capacity for resurrection, was most apparent. Indeed, as mentioned above, the devil was sometimes thought to go so far as to sacrifice and resurrect himself.[97] Whether the god's death occurred in the spring, as did the folk play ceremony, is uncertain, but the custom of sacrificing the god is itself well enough documented to furnish a clear parallel to the sacrifice of the Fool in the English folk play tradition. Within both institutions, an apparently obligatory death was inflicted upon ceremonial figures--the god and the Fool. Likewise, within both cult and play, those figures were regularly revived after that death.

In tracing the Fool's ancestry to the witch cult, one other characteristic of the devil figure should be examined. This is his place as ritual leader in the cult meetings. In those meetings the individual serving in the capacity of the

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[97]Lea, Materials, II, 559; III, 1314-15, 1321; Baroja, World, pp. 207-08; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 159-60.

deity not only had such predictable responsibilities as offerings, baptisms, instruction and the like, but he was also in charge of what might be called the festive aspect of the services. In the witch cult this ordinarily took the form of sharing food and drink, and joining in singing and dancing. In many instances, it should be noted, the latter activities were indulged in by themselves. Whatever the combination of these festive activities, however, the devil's role was conspicuous. For example, in 1662, Marie Lamont asserted that "the devill came to Kettrein Scott's house, in the midst of the night. He gave them wyn to drink, and wheat bread to eat, and they warr all very mirrie."[98] Similarly, Elizabeth Stile of Somerset testified that at a 1664 cult meeting "they had Wine, Cakes and Roastmeat (all brought by the Man in black) which they did eat and drink. They danced and were merry."[99] On another occasion, Forfar witches "made great merrimont," and Jonet Howat said of that gathering, "At this meiting there wer about twenty persones present with the divill, and the daunced togither and eat togither, having bieff, bread and ale." The Howat testimony was duplicated by Helen Guthrie, who claimed that ale was drunk, and also "aqua vitae. . . and thus made themselfes mirrie; and the divill made much of them all."[100] Similarly,

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[98]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 141.

[99]Ibid., p. 140.

[100]Ibid., pp. 138, 141.

in 1588, Alison Peirson described cult meetings featuring "pypeing and mirrynes and gude scheir [cheer]."[101]

Testimony of this sort indicates that, on occasion, cult meetings lent themselves to an atmosphere of gaiety and funmaking. The devil's contribution to those proceedings was not only that of host, but, as numerous documents suggest, he also served as leader of the singing and dancing. For example, in 1575, Danaeus unsympathetically reported that the witches, "Then fal. . . to dauncing, wherein he [the devil] leadeth the daunce. . . they hoppe and daunce merely about him, singing most filthy songs made in his prayse."[102] Charges against Margaret Og, in 1597, also took note of the devil's prominent role in the dancing, stating, "ye danced all togither, about a great stone, under the conduct of Satan, your master, a long space."[103] In 1597, Kethrein Mitchell was also accused of "dancing with the Devil,"[104] while John Douglas of Trenent confessed to "having merry meetings with Satan, onlivened with music and dancing."[105] Likewise, in 1597, Beatrice Robbie had gone "under the conduct of the Devil they master. . . to Craigleauche, and there dancing altogether about a great stone, a long space, and the Devil your master playing before you."[106] As this would indicate, the cult god was not

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[101] Ibid., p. 140.

[102] Ibid., p. 137.

[103] Ibid., p. 131.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., p. 136

[106] Ibid., p. 131.

always content with leading the dance, and sometimes combined this function with that of playing upon a musical instrument or singing. Indeed, as Murray concluded, "the devil himself was the usual performer."[107] For example, cult members from Somerset revealed that "the Man in black sometimes playes on a Pipe or Cittern, and the company dance."[108] Frequent mention was made of this type of performance. Jonet Lucan and others, for instance, were "under the conduct of they master, the Devil, dancing in ane ring, and he playing melodiously upon ane instrument."[109] At a meeting in the Pentland Hills, the devil "went before us in the likeness of a rough tanny Dog, playing on a pair of Pipes."[110] Finally, at Innerkip, Marie Lamont revealed that "the devil was in the likeness of a meikle black man, and sung to them and they dancit."[111] Testimony of this kind clearly tends to support the conclusion that the cult god was a primary agent in the festive aspects of the cult meetings, and that he often led the music and dancing himself.

It would seem that these activities also provide a

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[107] Ibid., pp. 135-36.

[108] Joseph Glanvil, Sadducismus Triumphatus (London, 1681), p. 141.

[109] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 136.

[110] Ibid.

[111] Ibid., pp. 38, 138.

precedent which any emerging dramatic tradition based on cult worship could hardly ignore. The god, to be presented fully, would need to have both his sober and his most attractive and socially congenial aspects emphasized. In echoing or providing a reminder of this more convivial side of the devil's nature, the English folk play seems to have employed the character of the Fool. This character, like the devil, not only led the dancing and merrymaking, but was at the same time the sacrificial victim. In addition, the Fool exhibited the shape-shifting capacity which marked the cult deity.

In terms of the Fool's other attributes, they also tend to link the character with the god of the witches. One of these involves the elevated station and deference sometimes afforded him, factors which were in marked contrast to his seemingly humble social position. Some index of the high and unusual estate sometimes held by the Fool can be found in the play at Escrick. In that instance, when the King and Queen entered they traditionally bowed to the Fool. Moreover, the Fool afterward announced, "Although my old clothes are ragged and torn, / I once was beloved by a Queen. / Some calls me a King, some calls me a clown. . . . "[112] Other instances of the Fool's elevated station are to be found in folk plays throughout both Cheshire and Lancashire. In these areas, the traditionally black-faced Fool was often

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[112]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 23-24.

called "King Coffee."[113] Although the latter part of the name undoubtedly referred to the Fool's complexion, no dramatic incident afforded any reason for the royal title. A final example of the Fool's status can be found in the drama at Ampleforth, where this stock character was not only the father of the King, but also vied for the hand of the Queen.[114]

Although facts such as these furnish an indication of the high station sometimes assigned the Fool, the plays offer no reason for such a position, nor do the Fool's royal attachments grow from any dramatic necessity. At Escrick, for instance, after the Fool announced, "Some calls me a King," the matter of royalty was dropped completely. No more references were made to his lineage, and no dramatic circumstances hinged upon it anywhere in the play. If the creators of the folk drama had no orthodox dramaturgical motivation in the matter, it is possible that the Fool's unexpected and dramatically unmotivated status served as a means of confirming his relationship to the cult god, a god to whom the deference of royalty would be an entirely appropriate and understandable gesture.

Another correspondence between the Fool and the central figure of the witch cult occurs as a result of, and emphasis upon, the phallus or phallic object. At such places as

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[113]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 197.

[114]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 53, 56.

Brailes, Abington, Winster, Brackley, Askham Richard and Bledington, the Fool's appearance was characterized by an inflated bladder[115]--whose phallic configuration is attested by folk scholar witnesses.[116] In addition, at such villages as Askham Richard, Bledington and Abington, this phallic bladder was fastened to a stick, and it was customary, before the performance, for the Fool to dash about amongst both performers and spectators, buffeting all who came within reach.[117] An incident in the Revesby sword play tends to confirm the phallic consciousness associated with the Fool. There, just before wooing the Man-Woman, Cicely, the Fool says, "A fool I heard thou say, / But more the other way, / For here I have a tool / Will make a maid to play. . . ."[118]

It is entirely possible that the folk play's emphasis upon the Fool's phallic characteristics may comprise a further reminder or symbolic reflection of the witch cult's central figure. Certainly, on regular ritual occasions, the

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[115]Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 86, 90, 127, 152; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28; III, 74, 89, 113; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 47; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 196, 208-09; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 77.

[116]Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 71, 74; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 197.

[117]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 77; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28; III, 74, 113; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 47.

[118]Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, p. 361. In regard to this sequence, Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 208, asserts, "There is nothing particularly interesting about this part of the play, obviously written to 'work in' the /man-/ woman grotesque."

cult deity was supposed to have had sexual congress with all present. In consequence of the god's need to fulfill this multiple sexual obligation, he was widely thought of, and conventionally pictured as, ithyphallic in his masculine manifestation. While it is unclear whether his repeated sexual intercourse was illusory, performed by means of a substitute, or rendered by himself through the agency of an artificial phallus, the association of the phallic organ with the god was a very common one.[119] Murray, for example, reproduces a drawing from a 1639 pamphlet which shows the cult deity as simultaneously hermaphroditic and ithyphallic.[120] Indeed, in a fashion recalling Dionysus, the witch god was sometimes credited with possessing the diphallus and triphallus, and, furthermore, was thought able to effect sexual engagement of these organs simultaneously.[121] Such characteristics were, of course, appropriate to a god who was believed to be generatively omnipotent. That being the case, it is possible to see in the prominence accorded the phallic bladder of the Fool an attitude reflecting the sexual potency and attributes of the cult god who is posited in this study as the source of this folk play character.

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[119]Masters, Eros, pp. 17-23; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 176-83; Rose, Razor, p. 51.

[120]Margaret Murray, The God of the Witches (London, 1956), frontispiece, unpaged.

[121]Masters, Eros, p. 17.

It is also appropriate to note that the Fool's sexual capacities were not exclusively masculine, for it will be recalled that in such places as Brackley and Bellerby the Fool was also a Man-Woman figure,[122] and in the Plough Monday play at Cropwell, it was Tom Fool upon whom "Dame Jane tries to father a child."[123] On at least two counts the sexual characteristics and capacities of the Fool seem reminiscent of the generative nature of the cult god. The two figures (god and Fool) were sexually active in both male and female roles, and both were accorded phallic emphasis in their respective ceremonies.

The folk play's Fool and the cult god seem to reflect each other in still another, final, characteristic. This was their mutually recurrent habit of associating themselves with animals. Like the phallic bladder, elements of animal disguise formed a pervasive usage in the English folk play, and, excepting the Hobby Horse, the stock character who most consistently wore animal insignia of some kind was the Fool. Unlike the Hobby Horse, however, the Fool was by no means limited to an identification with any single animal. For example, at Brailes, "the Fool blacked his face and wore a calf's skin slung over his shoulders";[124] at Grenoside,

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[122]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 125; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 89.

[123]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209-10.

[124]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28.

however, he donned a rabbit skin cap "with the head of the animal set in front,"[125] and, at Thenford, he employed either a "fox or hare-skin cap."[126] At Bellerby, the Fool was arrayed in lamb's wool, and in Berkshire his garment was, or resembled, sheepskin.[127] At Escrick, the Fool had foxtails dangling down his back, while at Sleights the entire foxskin was used.[128] In various other areas, such animals as deer, goats and oxen were also associated with the character.[129]

As a result of one animal association, that involving a cow or bullock's tail which was commonly attached either to the Fool's person or to the phallic bladder, the Fool often took the name of "Captain Cauf's Tail."[130] The name "Captain Cauf's Tail" was, in company with the tail itself, pervasive, being found in such areas as Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Northumberland.[131] Facts such as

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[125]Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 63-64.

[126]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 85.

[127]Ibid., pp. 84, 125.

[128]Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 15; III, 19.

[129]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214.

[130]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 47.

[131]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 90.

these clearly testify to the Fool's characteristic identification with a variety of animals, although, as the name "Captain Cauf's Tail" would suggest, the calf, cow or bull were commonest.

Like the Fool, the witch cult god adopted a number of animal appearances, one (the horse) having been discussed previously. It is uncertain as to the degree of physical authenticity the cult figure sought in attempting these animal forms, but it seems likely that, as with the horse, both mimetic and costume elements were exploited, sometimes singly, sometimes in combination. One extant description, that of Agnes Sampson in 1590, indicates use of rather extensive costume components to achieve what seems to have been a combination of animal and bird. The account reads as follows:

> His ers. . . was cauld like yce; his body was hard like yrn as they thocht that handled him; his face was terrible, his nose lyk the bek of an egle, gret bourning eyn; his handis and legis wer herry, with clawis vpon his handis and feit lyk the griffon.[132]

The animal form which the cult deity chose most often to identify himself with, as did the Fool in the folk plays, seems to have been the calf, bull or cow.[133] In 1597, for example, Agnes Webster was accused of attending a cult meeting where "Satan apperit to the in the likenes of a

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[132]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 62.

[133]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

calff."[134] In 1662, when referring to the cult's devil figure, Isobel Gowdie admitted that "somtym he vold be lyk a . . . bull."[135] Other animals, while less common, were still reported. Isobel Gowdie not only referred to the calf disguise used by the cult god, but also affirmed his appearance as a "deir, a rae, or a dowg"; moreover, to Joan Waterhouse, he was "in the lykenes of a great dogge."[136] Jonet Blak testified that the cult figure appeared to her as a "dog with a sowis head,"[137] and elsewhere, the devil chose such animal forms as the sheep, lamb, cat, and even fowl.[138] Consequently it seems evident that the cult god shared with the Fool of the folk play the habit of associating himself with one or another of a variety of animals. Furthermore, the most frequent of these associations, that involving a cow, bull or calf, was mutual to both, while on occasions, other forms such as the lamb, sheep and deer were also exploited by the two figures in their respective ceremonies.

A wide range of correspondences can now be seen to exist between the Fool of the folk play and the witch cult

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[134] Ibid., p. 65.

[135] Ibid., p. 66.

[136] Ibid., pp. 65-66; see also Hole, Witchcraft, pp. 55-58, 66-67, 94-96.

[137] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 67.

[138] Ibid., pp. 65-70, 182, 226-27; Masters, Eros, pp. 75-76.

god. Both regularly appeared as black-faced sacrificial figures who died and were revived; both functioned as ceremonial dance leaders; both resurrected the dead; both exhibited shape-shifting abilities; both called attention to their phallic attributes; and both were functionally hermaphroditic. Also significant is the fact that each figure commanded the respect and deference of his most highly placed consorts. Finally, each associated himself with a variety of animals, often the same ones. While none of these facts, by itself, could be looked upon as a distinctive proof of relationship, there is a high correspondence between the activities or traits which typify the Fool and the basic ritual phenomena attaching to the cult god.

In conclusion, it appears that the most marked attributes of the five stock characters in the English folk play correspond in a variety of ways to ritually important aspects of the witch cult god. It becomes possible, therefore, to explain the insistent appearance of the five stock characters in the fertility-oriented plays by virtue of the fact that each represented an inseparable aspect of the fertility god. Or, as stated earlier, assuming the natal debt of the folk play to the English fertility religion, and the possible impulse to retain the cult god's powers and characteristics in that emerging drama, it would stand to reason that the dramatic form would contain elements designed to present the most important attributes of the

god to the folk audiences. The five stock characters--Black Man, Man-Woman, Hobby Horse, Doctor and Fool--unmistakably appear to serve that function.

CHAPTER IV

THE PLAYS: INTERNAL EVIDENCE

The evidence cited previously demonstrates that the distinctive qualities or activities of the folk plays' stock characters duplicate commonly identified attributes of the witch cult god. In view of this, it is appropriate to examine textual evidence of the play scripts to determine whether the parallel between folk theatre and witch cult asserts itself there. With regard to the use of the word "textual," however, one qualification should be noted. In folk material, oral traditions frequently serve as primary evidence, written scripts being derivative. While the bulk of the ensuing chapter will focus upon the plays as they have been recorded, some portion of it will involve material from the oral traditions which have been preserved by folk authorities.

In turning to the scripts themselves, the first textual evidence of a correspondence to the traditions of the witch cult can be discerned in the plays' tendency to employ given names which were identical to those assigned to members of the cult. The importance of names in the witch cult is a matter of record, inasmuch as, upon admission, initiates of

the fertility religion were given baptismal names sanctioned by the cult.[1] This practice seems to have encouraged the witches' repetitious use of certain given names, a fact established in Murray's tabulation of names from English trial documents and records of the time. Murray's compilation, extending from the fourteenth into the eighteenth century, lists the names of 685 different individuals,[2] but despite this number, and despite the passage of four centuries, only about seventy different given names were employed,[3] a fact which plainly indicates the cult's practice of retaining the same first names. Some of these names were apparently so popular that it was normal for them to be employed repetitiously in local covens containing no more than thirteen members. In Somerset, for example, a coven included two members named John, two named Richard, two named Thomas, and two named Margaret. A Queensferry coven listed pairings of Catherine, Helen, Janet and Margaret, together with three members named Marion. At St. Albans, three of the women were named Mary, and no less than five men shared the name John. An Alloa coven listed two men named James, two women named Kathren, three called Jonet, and three others named

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[1]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 82-85.

[2]Ibid., pp. 255-70.

[3]A tabulating problem exists inasmuch as related names, such as Thomas and Thomasine, could be regarded as a single name. Even under the most limited system of tabulation, however, the Murray count would only be adjusted by ten.

Margret. Finally, as at Queensferry, all but two of an Essex coven shared their names with another member.[4] Even within these repetitious circumstances, certain of the witch names achieved noticeable popularity, as the quintuple appearance of the name John in the St. Albans coven might suggest. Indeed, in Murray's catalogue, the name John occurs more than three times oftener than any other male name.

Assuming, as this study does, that the witch cult provided the generative impulse underlying the folk plays, the probability exists that a custom as well established as the repetitious use of names in the cult would have been perpetuated by the fertility religion's dramatic heir. To check on that relationship between cult and play, it is necessary to compile a list of the names used in the folk dramas. In constructing such a list, however, two problems should be mentioned. First, the folk theatre sometimes indulged in obviously invented names, appelations such as "Captain Thunderbolt," "Giant Blunderbore," and "Cleverlegs." In cataloguing the names of characters in the folk plays, invented names such as these will not be taken into account. Second, since the folk plays continued to be acted even into the twentieth century, historically famous names like Napoleon, St. George, and Oliver Cromwell crept into the dramas. In the present list, names of that type have also been

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[4]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 250-54.

omitted. Consideration is limited to conventional given names and their derivatives.

In making a tabulation of this kind it is logical to examine, first, the mummers' plays, inasmuch as the sword plays and Morris dances are drastically more limited in their use of different character names. The mummers' plays employ a total of thirty-nine male characters who bear conventional names. Of the total, only four--Phillip, Peter, Ned and Penty--are not witch names, and each of these appears only once.[5] Thus, thirty-five of thirty-nine male characters are assigned witch names.[6] It is worth noting that by far the most common male witch name on Murray's list is "John"; it appears more than three times oftener than any other male name included. Similarly, in twenty-three of the thirty-nine instances where a masculine role is assigned a conventional name, that name is "John," or its derivative, "Jack." Thus, the name most frequently employed in the mummers' play is the one most commonly assigned to male members of the witch cult.

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[5]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, pp. 148, 160, 187, 233. Murray's list appears in Witch Cult, pp. 255-70. For this and subsequent tallies, the mummers' play source remains Tiddy.

[6]The names of the male characters and one instance of their appearance follow; the source is Tiddy, Mummers' Play: Tom, p. 146; John, p. 148; William, p. 148; Penty, p. 148; Henry, p. 149; Phillip, p. 160; Alex, p. 178; Peter, p. 187; Dick, p. 233; Ned, p. 233; Arthur, p. 236; Robin, p. 236. Use of nicknames is often folk practice in characters and dance titles: this is to be expected. Murray's list, drawn from trial records, naturally employs the more formal names. Thus, while Tom, Alex or Dick are not found in Murray's list, the formal equivalents--Thomas, Alexander, Richard--are present; the same holds true for other nickname usage.

While the female figures in the plays, more properly the Man-Woman characters, are given conventional names less often, in each of the seven instances where they are so named, a traditional witch cult name is chosen.[7] When both male and female characters are considered, of the forty-six characters in the mummers' plays who are given conventional names, forty-two are called by names used in the witch cult tradition.

If these folk play characters were given names cognate with those used by the witch cult, it might be expected that this custom would be honored elsewhere in the folk tradition, specifically, in the sword play and Morris dance. Although the majority of characters in the sword plays and Morris dances were simply named by function or position--"Fool," "King," or "Beggar," for instance--the Man-Woman figure is usually given a conventional and highly repetitive name. In the sword plays, this is most often Bessy, with such variants as Betty, Besem Betty, Dirty Bet (when the black face is added), Doll, Dame Jane, Madgy, and Madgy-Peg.[8] All of these are witch names, and all of them, like the characters John and Jack in the mummers' play, appear again and again. Indeed, in only a single instance is the Man-Woman of the

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[7]The names of the female characters and one instance of their appearance follow: Dolly, p. 157; Sally, p. 188; Molly, p. 222; Mary Ann, p. 236; Jane, p. 238.

[8]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 125; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 77, 86, 103; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 192-94; Sharp and MacMaine, Morris Book, III, 89.

sword play assigned a name not used in the witch cult tradition.[9] Similarly, when conventionally named, the Fool of the sword play is regularly called Tom or Tommie. In this case, the usage is so pervasive that the character is often referred to as the Tom, the sobriquet having become synonymous with the word "fool."[10]

The same repetitious use of names occurs in conjunction with the Man-Woman character of the Morris dance. In this activity, the bisexual figure has but four names, Moll, Molly, Maid Marion and Bet, the last being employed but seldom.[11] Once again, all these are witch names.

Aside from character designation, the Morris dance provides another opportunity to check the pervasiveness of the witch names in the folk tradition. This involves the titles traditionally affixed to the individual Morris dance configurations.[12] Sharp lists twenty-seven such individually titled dance figures in the Morris tradition.[13] As might be

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[9]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 194; Briget is the name of the Man-Woman in the non-witch usage; it is found at the village of Wharfdale.

[10]Ibid., I, 192-94; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 125.

[11]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 89; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 179; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 152.

[12]These formations are susceptible to a much wider variety of execution than are those of the sword dance, where the custom of named dances consequently occurs much less often.

[13]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 83; II, 11, 50, 54, 58, 61; III, 66, 91, 94, 95; Cecil J. Sharp, The Morris Book (London, 1911), IV, 7; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 37, 54, 79, 80, 111.

anticipated, some of the titles simply reflect the nature of the dance, as does the "Fool's Jog" at Bampton, while other titles suggest costume motifs, like the "Greensleeves Dance" at Wyresdale.[14] Sixteen of the twenty-seven dances, however, are identified by some use of a person's name. Of these sixteen names, fifteen are witch names.[15]

The correspondence of folk theatre names to those used by the witch cult cannot be interpreted as categorical proof of a link between the two activities, but it does provide a further indication that such a relationship may exist. Since the argument may be put forth that the names are common ones, and that the cult's adoption of them was merely coincidental with their popularity, it should be noted that many other names common to England, names like Harold, Edgar, Charles, Alfred, Malcolm, Edward, Roderick, Clarence, Bruce, Edwin, and Geoffrey, do not appear in Murray's list. The case appears similar for women. Murray's list does not contain such usual feminine names as Edith, Carolyn, Elaine, Gertrude, Cynthia, Eloise, Dianne, Audrey, Sylvia, Jennifer and

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[14]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 66; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 111.

[15]The names employed were: "Constant Billy," "Rodney" (the non-witch name), "Bobbing Joe," "Highland Mary," "Jockie to the Fair," "Old Black Joe," "William and Nancy," "Dearest Dickey," "Bobby and Joan," "Molly Oxford," "Sweet Jenny Jones." The title "Constant Billy" appears in four different villages, Headington, Bampton, Sherborne and Adderbury, and has been counted as four different usages of a witch name. See Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 83; II, 11, 50, 54; III, 41, 49, 91; Sharp, Morris Book, IV, 7; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 37, 54.

Evelyn.[16] In addition, the correlation between cult names and character names appears somewhat higher than random coincidence would suggest. Of the sixty-two name usages recorded (sixteen in the Morris dance, and forty-six in the mummers' play), fifty-seven are witch names. Since this represents over ninety percent of the total, the probability of the duplication being coincidental seems remote. The possibility of coincidence is further reduced when the highly repetitious witch names of the Man-Woman in the sword plays and Morris dances are added to the tally.

The correspondence of given names in the folk play and witch cult suggests the possibility that other names in the folk drama may also reflect a cult ancestry. Evidence pointing to such a heritage can be found in the mummers' play custom of naming the Fool "Beelzebub." Not only was the name Beelzebub a popular synonym for the word "devil," but it was also used by witches to refer to the god and to conjure him with.[17] It is interesting to note, therefore, that the name was given to the mummers' play Fool in a variety of locations. It appeared at Longborough, Gloucestershire, at Weston-sub-Edge (in the same county), at Newport,

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[16]That witch names were not adopted on the basis of general popularity seems evident from the fact that while such names as Edward, Alfred, Charles, Edgar, Stephen and Harold were all king's names and hence widely adopted among the population, none appeared as a witch name.

[17]Lea, Materials, III, 1107; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 28, 143, 184.

at Eccleshall, in the Plough Monday play at Cropwell, at Newbold and at Lutterworth.[18] As might be expected, there were the usual folk variations in its usage. At Sapperton, Gloucestershire, the character becomes Belsey Bob, at Ovingdean, Sussex, Bellzie Bub; at Icomb, Gloucestershire, Bells Abub, and at Malvern, Bellsey Bob once more.[19] The names Hub Bub and Lord Grubb, in use at Cornwall and Chiswick, are probable further corruptions. Nevertheless, in village after village Beelzebub remains the Fool; indeed, in one place his name is unmistakably rendered, Beelzebub the Fool.[20]

The appropriateness of naming the Fool Beelzebub has already been suggested in Chapter III. The Fool's sacrificial status, his frequent black face, his shape-shifting ability and his phallic identification all correspond directly to attributes of the central cult figure, Beelzebub.

In addition to these cult-oriented capacities, one of the Fool's acts or gestures demands particular attention inasmuch as it makes the cult name Beelzebub even more appropriate for him. In play after play, the Fool makes a peculiar backward entrance, accompanied by his usual opening

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[18]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, pp. 167, 180; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214.

[19]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, pp. 173, 177, 203, 232.

[20]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 65; (Mrs.) Chaworth Musters, A Cavalier Stronghold (London, 1890), p. 388; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 78. Other variants of the name include Old Billy Beelzebub, Belcibub, Belzeebug, Bellsie Bob, Baal Zebub.

line, "In comes I, Old Hind-before," or "In comes I hind before," or something similar.[21] The witch custom of awarding their local coven leader--the devil--a posterior kiss, as the Bishop of Coventry was accused of doing in 1300,[22] has been shown by Murray to have its origin in the fact that the devil sometimes wore not one but two masks, the first conventionally placed, the second upon his buttocks.[23] It is consequently possible that Beelzebub's "hind before" entrance was a reminder of this peculiarity, one not so obvious as to arouse Christian suspicions, but plain enough to have been recognized by any cult initiates to whom the plays originally may have been directed.

In a custom provocatively similar to that of naming the Fool Beelzebub, the mummers' play linked the figure of the Black Man to the cult by a verbal tradition as suggestive as the visual convention involving his blackened appearance. In terms of this association between the folk play's Black Man and the witch cult, there is evidence that, in many localities, it was regularly the practice to incorporate the word "devil" into the name given a black-visaged character. The result was a series of names such as Devil Dout, Little Devil Dout, Little Devil Don't, and others. The framers of

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[21]Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 14, 19, 227. The custom extended to the sword play as well: see Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 78.

[22]Rose, Razor, p. 64; Graves, White Goddess, p. 441.

[23]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 10, 62, 68-69, 129, 247; see also Lea, Materials, II, 517; Masters, Eros, p. 23.

the English folk play did not, however, let matters rest there. They took the name Devil Dout and added to it the most popular of male witch names, John, or its colloquial equivalent, Jack. Accordingly, names like Jack Devil Dout, Little Jack Devil Dout, and Little Jack Dout appeared.[24] Chambers points out that at Leigh, Little Devil Dout refers to himself simply as "Jack," an instance which would represent a popular shortening of the Black Man's "Devil" name. That process resulted in names like Black Jack, Fat Jack, Happy Jack, Little Jack, and even John Jack or Johnny Jack. All cases considered, it would appear that, through the label given to the play's Black Man, folk performers were not only perpetuating the name of the devil, but also stressing the most popular of witch names, John, a name that both the Black Man Devil Dout of the plays and the black man devil figure of the cult often assumed. The persistence of the name John for the plays' Devil Dout character was clearly reflected in Salisbury where the black-faced Johnny Jack gave his name to the rest of the mummers, so that the entire troupe was known locally as John Jacks.[25] In considering the implications of the custom of calling the black-faced Devil Dout character "Black Jack,"[26] it will be

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[24]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 73; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214-15; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 14, 67, 180.

[25]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 215; Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 65. Other names included Jim Jack, Saucy Jack, Little Man Jack, Humpty Jack and Jump-backed Jack.

[26]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 65.

helpful to recall Isobel Gowdie's statement that, in her coven, "Som tymis, among owr felwis, we wold be calling him 'Blak Johne' or the lyk."[27]

The extent of the parallel between the folk plays' use of witch cult names and customs is further established when one of the folk play festivals, that of Plough Monday, is examined. The traditional first day for spring ploughing in England was called Plough Monday. Before the ploughing could begin, however, the folk play stock characters and other participants in a subsequent sword play, Morris dance, or mummers' play had to drag a plough through the entire village, making sure to cross each resident's property in what is generally conceded to have been an invocation of fertility.[28] Similarly, the witch cult tradition contains records of a ploughing ceremony in which "the divell held the plewgh. . . . and all we of the Coeven went still wp and downe with the plewghe, prayeing to the Divell for the fruit of that land."[29]

When other aspects of the Plough Monday folk play ceremonies are examined, additional similarities between the folk theatre and the witch cult are discovered. In the Plough Monday play at Northants, for instance, the faces of

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[27]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 199.

[28]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 14; Musters, Stronghold, p. 387; John Brand, Observations on the Popular Antiquities of Great Britain (London, 1903), I, 278; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 108, 207-09.

[29]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 171.

the participants were painted black or red. Horse cut-outs of the same colors decorated the shirts at Cropwell and Notts, while the plough itself was often called "the fool plough" or the "white plough." Most interesting, however, is the Huntingdonshire tradition of referring to the entire ceremony as "plough-witching,"[30] a distinct linguistic linking of the two practices. In considering linguistic evidence such as this, the connection between the Plough Monday folk play festival and the witch cult would appear to become quite plain. The folk lorist, Hole, points out, for instance, that "in Northamptonshire, the guise /Morris/ dancers used to be called witch men."[31] Thus, while "plough-witching" was carried on in Huntingdonshire, in adjacent Northamptonshire, the stock characters and other performers were "witch-men." Moreover, the usage was widespread, for in the northern and northeastern counties of Norfolk, Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Northumberland, the folk play performers were not only called "witch-men," but also "plough-witchers."[32]

Parallels between the names used in the English folk play and those of the cult would seem to indicate that the folk theatre may have been shaped or influenced by the

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[30]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209; for colors see ch. V.

[31]Hole, Witchcraft, p. 31; see also Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 227, for the identification of the guisers with the Morris dancers in the area.

[32]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 90.

fertility religion of the witches. With such evidence as background, it is now appropriate to examine some of the folk plays' dialogue for similar indications of a consciousness and/or reflection of the witch cult.

Before drawing conclusions about the plays' textual material, it should be pointed out that matters of dialogue and motivation in the folk plays have long been items confusing to, or ignored by, scholars. Many agree with Jessie L. Weston, who describes folk play dialogue as being "interspersed with unintelligible gibberish."[33] Insofar as this obscurity is concerned, the numerous decrees and witch trials would indicate that the witch cult had strong motivation for keeping its activities at least partly submerged. Thus, if their rites did provide an impetus for the folk plays, a certain amount of obscurity might well be expected in any portion of the dialogue which reflected cult powers or beliefs. This, when combined with the corruptions of usage through the centuries, would naturally produce a frequently garbled effect. When that dialogue is approached in terms of possible relationships to cult meanings, however, some measure of its confusion disappears, and a degree of rational interpretation becomes possible.

One play in which the dialogue seems to contain marked evidence of cult origins is the Escrick sword play. Within

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[33]Jessie L. Weston, From Ritual to Romance (New York, 1957), pp. 95-96.

the first ten lines of its Prologue, spoken by the Fool, a direct reference to witches can be found. The Fool enters, announces that "our actors are a-coming in," and launches into an abrupt bit of autobiography which informs the spectators that

> My old Grand-ma was a witch,
> As I've heard people speak,
> She rode a-hunting on our black bitch
> To yonder corner neak /nook/.[34]

The dog was, of course, one of the most commonly used or recognized witch animals, both as a disguise for the devil and as a witches' familiar.[35] The black color of the dog to which the Escrick Fool referred was similarly appropriate if performers and spectators had a first hand acquaintance with the concepts and conventions of the cult. A subsequent reminder of the influences which may have been at work in the Escrick play is added by the Fool's wife, the Man-Woman. When she appeared, she was traditionally "dressed like a witch," in bonnet, shawl, and, moreover, she carried the traditional witches' "besom."[36] Quite overtly, then, the Escrick play provides the Fool with relatives who are identified as witches, albeit their appearance has no dramatic motivation. This condition, and, in particular, the deliberate reference to the link between the Fool's family

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[34]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 21.

[35]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 66-68, 212-15, 223-25ff.

[36]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 20.

and witchcraft becomes somewhat more explicable when the Fool's role as sacrificial figure in the play is considered.

The Fool's status as a sacrificial victim in the Escrick play is suggested in several ways. That sacrificial potential is indicated, first, by the Fool himself when, at the very outset of the play, he apprises the audience of the fact that he has escaped from that fate on a previous occasion.

> With your leave, kind gentlemen,
> Of you I'll take a view;
> Our actors are a-coming in:
> The /they/ will be here enoo.
> I was condemned to die,
> As I've heard people say,
> But I got my reprieve, so I
> Came jogging on this way.
> My old Grand-ma was a witch. . . .[37]

While no explanation is offered for the fact that the Fool once "was condemned to die," the fact that he was formerly so condemned is provocatively juxtaposed with the revelation that "Grand-ma was a witch." Furthermore, both pieces of information are transmitted within the first ten lines of the play, a time when audience attention presumably would have been high,[38] and when lines of some importance might be anticipated.

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[37] Ibid., III, 21.

[38] The folk plays ordinarily incorporated pre-performance ceremonies in which one of the stock characters would "make room," using broom or sword: the act seems to have had ritual significance, see ch. V, but it was also directly concerned with moving the spectators to acceptable viewing positions, and with jollying them or badgering them into attentiveness, a task the Fool's phallus-shaped bladder was often put to--the fertility symbol thus making possible the fertility ceremony. See Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 15, 16, 22, 33, 127.

If the Fool's opening lines and the fact that his grandmother was a witch qualify him as a sacrificial figure, the same may be true of the fact that, at Escrick, the foxtails dangling from his hat became an unvarying part of his costume. Since foxtails were the traditional insignia of sacrificial status, the tails attached to the Fool's hat could plainly act to confirm the suspicion that he was not performing the role of an ordinary fool, but rather of a figure destined to be slain. That role would have been entirely compatible with a character who, by being both a convivial leader of festivities and a sacrificial figure, served as a reflection of the cult god. Moreover, there was little possibility that the spectators at Escrick would have ignored the foxtails and their implications, since the Fool specifically called attention to them. A study of the dialogue finds him admitting that while he may be called "Mr. Tate," in reality his "name it is Mr. Foxtails; foxtails / Are fair on my back to be seen. . . ."[39] At the outset of the Escrick play, therefore, it can be seen that the Fool offered several indications (both verbal and visual) that he was to be the sacrificial figure. Each of these indications, moreover, admits the possibility that the Fool may also have represented the annually sacrificed incarnate deity of the cult.

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[39] Ibid., III, 23.

Elsewhere in the Escrick script the Fool suggests that he possesses the qualities essential to one who would serve in this sacrificial capacity. Introducing the Man-Woman, his "blest confounded wife," the Fool reveals his status in this manner:

> If you wish to know my name
> That before they did me call,
> I was once as fine a gentleman
> As any of you all.
> But now this wedding's brought me down
> And made of me a fool. . . .[40]

The statement that he "was once. . . a gentleman" hardly seems compatible with his apparent lament that he was "made . . . a fool," and, typically, no explanation is offered for that contradiction. An explanation becomes possible, however, if the Fool is viewed as a character who, in the drama, bears the attributes of the cult god and performs the god's ritual acts within the context of the play. The cult deity is known to have had both an elevated stature and the less noble role of festive maker of the "mirrynes and gude scheir" described by cultist Alison Peirson in 1588.[41] The reason for an apparently common, lowly character, a buffoon, to have such a critical role in the drama may well have been that his dual attributes corresponded to those which the cult god himself manifested in the performance of his ceremonial duties.

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[40] Ibid.

[41] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 140.

A final portion of the Fool's dialogue serves to further establish the quality of the Fool's station. Just before the moment of his sacrifice, the Fool reveals,

> Although my old clothes are ragged and torn,
> I once was beloved by a Queen.
> Some calls me a King, some calls me a Clown,
> My valour I'll never deny. . . . [42]

In the light of such information, the Fool's appropriateness for this sacrificial role becomes more apparent. By possessing the qualities cited in the dialogue above, the Fool duplicated still another basic characteristic of the cult god, a characteristic which had long been associated with a figure who underwent ritual death and revival.

It is also significant that the Fool's dialogue, up to the moment of sacrifice, establishes the fact that he possesses the witch cult god's characteristic multiple identity. Indeed, before the decapitation, the Fool admits to six different identities or names: he is gentleman, fool, Mr. Tate, Mr. Foxtails, King and Clown.

The case for identifying the Escrick Fool with the witch cult god is an inferential one, but in total, it contains an impressive number of correspondences between the folk character and the devil. Both figures possessed witch relatives; both wore such sacrificial insignia as animal skins or tails; both combined a lowly status with high position and the right to profound respect; both possessed a

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[42] Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 24.

multiple identity. In addition, both were eligible for ceremonial death and resurrection.

In addition to the preceding features, the Fool at Escrick demonstrated still another characteristic linking him to the witch cult tradition. Specifically, this stems from the fact that, sometimes, as at Lutterworth, Newbold and Escrick, not one but two Fools appear,[43] with the second Fool being the one who undergoes the ritual death. In the text of the Escrick play, the Fool is replaced by a duplicate named "Woody Garius," who dies in his stead. The fact that the Escrick play employs a substitute victim demands examination. Clearly, no dramatic contingency forced the decision, and the second Fool at Escrick, by conventional standards of character motivation, has no dramatic raison d'être whatever.

While on the surface this may appear to be a case of textual unaccountability, it is entirely possible that the explanation for this seemingly arbitrary, even intrusive, appearance of the second Fool lies in the institutions of the fertility cult of the witches. Evidence has indicated plainly that the first Fool had ties to that cult. If those ties were accurately discerned, and if the folk plays did, as this study posits, derive from cult rites, it may be possible to account for the second Fool in the cult rite also. Viewed in this light, the second Fool at Escrick

[43] Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214.

would represent the drama's counterpart to the surrogate found in cult ritual; he would serve as a dramatic equivalent to the cult's traditional sacrificial substitute.[44]

If the second Fool at Escrick served as a sacrificial figure, a surrogate, it is reasonable to expect that textual and/or visual evidence would have been provided to make the fact clear to the audience. In attempting to determine whether the play did make an effort to identify the second Fool with the cult, either directly, or by identification with the cult-related Mr. Foxtails, one problem arises. At Escrick, the second Fool is brought on, introduced and sacrificed so summarily that it may be questioned whether he could, in the time allotted, have acquired his predecessor's sacrificial stature. There is reason to believe, however, that, brief as the second Fool's exposure may have been, sufficient clues were offered to enable the audience to accept him as a worthy successor (surrogate) for the original Fool. In the first place, Woody, the replacement Fool, wore a cap similar to his predecessor's, a cap complete with the dangling foxtails which served as sacrificial insignia.[45] It would require no very fine eye to see the essential repetition of a type here. The foxtails would

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[44]For discussions of the use of surrogate figures in cult worship, see Margaret Murray, The Divine King in England (London, 1954), pp. 44-56, 82-164; Murray, God, pp. 171-76; Williamson, Arrow, p. 42 et passim.

[45]Sharp, Sword Dance, III, 19.

indicate that the wearer was a traditional or qualified sacrificial figure, one appropriate for the play's ensuing ritual death.

Although the introduction of Woody may have been brief, it contained verbal elements which identified him as one capable of, or destined for, a sacrificial act. In his introduction of Woody, the first Fool declared,

> Here's Woody Garius I'd like to forgot,
> His beauty's so much like my own;
> But if I get his fat head to the pot,
> I'll make it strike fourteen at noon.[46]

Several aspects of this brief speech should be observed. The first is its placement and its potential for assuring maximum audience attention. Before the speech begins, the first Fool has not only introduced all of the participants, but he has turned to the matter of his own identity in the speech beginning, "If you wish to know my name." Instead of giving his name, however, he starts a recital of his personal history, breaking off in the middle of it to introduce Woody. Thus, the introduction had an element of the unexpected, the advantage of surprise. It might well have attracted special attention inasmuch as the very process of self-interruption tends to dramatize and intensify the importance of the material being inserted. By its placement in the script, Woody's introduction is thus rendered more important, more likely to be attended to. Only after this

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[46] Ibid., III, 24.

advantage is afforded Woody does Mr. Foxtails, the first Fool, return to the subject of his autobiography.

This latter fact draws attention to another way in which the placement or handling of Woody's introduction added to an awareness of the character. Since Woody's introduction is sandwiched between details of his predecessor's history, crucial details of that history could, even unencouraged, transfer themselves to the substitute figure. Moreover, it would have been a simple matter for Woody to have enhanced this transfer of information and characteristics. By pointing to himself or nodding affirmatively he might have attested to the fact that the information applied to him as well. Likewise, he could have mimed the details he wanted applied to him, holding out his own foxtails, for instance, when the appropriate lines were spoken.

Finally, the introduction itself is perhaps the strongest factor in establishing the unity of the two Fools. With the line, "Here's Woody," the first Fool may have been saying, in effect, "I nearly forgot him because he's so much like me!" The introduction and the autobiographical data are integrated in such a way that it would appear, first, that the Fool assumes the audience knows he has been talking about his twin, and, then, that he discovers the parallel may not be clear. At that point he stops, identifies Woody, and resumes his autobiography.

A final factor indicative of the possibility that the second Fool is a figure of sacrificial stature is to be found in a study of his name, Woody. While the usage is today archaic, the Middle English form of the word ("wod") carried the meaning of "mad." Moreover, in both Old and Middle English, the madness connoted was of a special kind. It was a case of being "possessed, inspired, divinely mad," as in Partridge's definition of the Old Norse word "othr" to which it is related.[47] The sense of divine madness, in turn, seems to derive from the fact that "wod" is the form from which the name of the god Woden evolved. Woody, or wood-like, then, is wod-y or Woden-like; that is, possessed by Woden, divinely mad. Woden, of course, is an appropriate god to link to the rite being enacted because of his capacity for death and rebirth. Further, he is sometimes identified as the god of the witches, although this is by no means clear.[48]

The relationship between the character name and his status or significance in the ritual dimension of the play can be illuminated further by an examination of another Middle English usage. "Woody" in Northern England, where Escrick is located, is a variant of "withy," "widdie," and "widdy," all usages which denote a particular kind of rope.

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[47]Eric Partridge, Origins: the Encyclopedia of Words (New York, 1959), p. 100.

[48]Rose, Razor, p. 60.

Traditionally, this was one made of intertwined withes (willow shoots), the product being employed by regional custom as a hangman's rope--the use of willow perhaps having descended from the Druids' practice of drowning sacrificial figures in woven baskets of willow.[49] Thus, etymologically, the name Woody carried connotations of divine frenzy and ritual death. Moreover, those connotations of ritual death survived into colloquial Renaissance usage of the word. In view of these facts, it would seem possible that the name of the surrogate Fool could well have had clear ritualistic implications for folk play audiences.

There are, therefore, three factors which suggest that the connection between the second Fool, Woody, and sacrificial death is one which a folk audience could have made readily. Verbal clues were provided by his name and his introduction; a visual index to his status or ritual identity was afforded by his foxtails. Then, to make the identification certain, he was recognized as an equal by the first Fool, whose sacrificial credentials were unequivocal. Viewed in these terms, there is every reason to believe that his appearance and actions were in no way illogical or unaccountable. There was purpose in his appearance, a

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[49] Random House Dictionary of the English Language (New York, 1966), entry under willow; Graves, White Goddess, p. 177.

purpose grounded in the ritual dimension of the Escrick play, and fulfilled when, as a surrogate, he was decapitated and revived.

Both directly and inferentially, then, textual evidence of the Escrick sword play reveals the possibility of witch cult influence. A witch is openly mentioned as a relative; another witch appears as a Man-Woman character, married to the central figure of the performance, who, in turn, exhibits traits which link him to the cult god. His ritual double, whom he openly recognizes as his counterpart, who wears identical sacrificial insignia, and whose name connotes ritual death, is ultimately sacrificed in cult fashion to provide the climax of the ritual-oriented dramatic event.

While the characters of most folk plays do not openly testify to a relationship to witches, they do offer several marked parallels to the characteristics and capacities of the cult god. A typical case in point is that provided by the Doctor of the Ampleforth sword play.

In traditional folk play fashion, the Ampleforth script calls for the death of one of its characters and the subsequent appeal for a doctor. That character enters, "riding on the back of another man. He dismounts."[50] It becomes clear that the figure carrying the Doctor is to be viewed as a horse when, as part of his fee, the Doctor demands

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[50]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 73.

"some oats for my horse."[51] Further, it develops that the Doctor's name is Ivan, a form of John, the most popular of male witch names--one preferred, perhaps, because of the word-play it allowed: "My name is Ivan-Iovan-tantaman."[52] The possible connection between the Doctor and the witch cult is strengthened when he announces that he is a seventh son, a magically portentous thing in the witch cult, which a figure laying claim to a witch's magical curative powers would stress. Moreover, the Doctor follows this with the assertion that "If there are nineteen devils in a man, I can fetch twenty out."[53] While this sort of folk play dialogue is ordinarily passed off as gibberish, as indeed it may be, there are factors which may alter that judgement. The Doctor's entire claim, that he can "cure men with their heads off, men with their hearts out, the itch, the stitch, the stone, the bone, the pulse and the gout; and if there are nineteen devils in a man, I can fetch twenty out,"[54] may sound absurd, but spectators cognizant of the curative powers of the devil and the witches could have detected the very reason for the character's appearance in that comic absurdity. Moreover, the extraction of twenty devils from the abode of nineteen would be simple enough for a witch, since, in terms of the witch's power to inhabit another's person, the witch himself would have constituted the twentieth.

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[51] Ibid., III, 74-75.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid.

It might be argued, of course, that the Doctor's actions, speech and function are seemingly contradictory. Within the dramatic framework the Doctor does, indeed, combine a comic function with his serious, cult-like resurrective power. It scarcely seems a contradiction, however, when it is remembered that the cult god's nature was equally dualistic, being both festive and serious. Rather than a contradiction, therefore, there appears to be a striking confirmation of the possibility of the god's presence in the Doctor, who traditionally performs the act of resurrection which summarizes the god's control over the spheres of life, death, rebirth.

It is possible that the content or nature of the Doctor's dialogue may have been more than mere accident or comic endeavor. It may have represented the Doctor's tacit admission of his character's relationship to the witches and their fertility centered beliefs. It is not too difficult to accept this possibility if it is remembered the Doctor arrived as the devil often did, on a simulated (human) horse; he assured the group of his curative powers; his name was a form of the most popular male witch name; he was a seventh son, and he professed to be able to exorcise devils. If, as scholars postulate, the plays represented or extended the people's long established fertility practices, the Doctor, with his witch god type of activity and resurrective potential, would have insured the presence of critical cult factors in the drama.

The possibility of justifying or comprehending the Doctor's presence in the play on the basis of his tendency to perpetuate the cult god's image or power is enhanced when other of his attributes are considered. For instance, in the Ampleforth play the Doctor promises that "if ever a fair lady in this room wants a husband, bring her to me and I'll find her one."[55] This could, of course, be considered sheer tomfoolery or a capability assigned capriciously to the Doctor to heighten the exaggeration and, hence, the jest. If, however, the Doctor did function as the play's counterpart of the witch deity, he would have had a very critical place in the drama. The god, whose powers the Doctor reflected, had been the key figure in the great pagan fertility festivals which are assumed to have been transmuted into drama, and at which every woman past the age of puberty had a ritual obligation to accept a man sexually.[56]

The genesis of the folk play characters in the witch cult is further indicated by the Man-Woman character of the Winster Morris dance. A study of the characters in this dance-drama reveals that this role-blending, cult-type figure was dressed like the Escrick Besom-Betty in shawl, bonnet and skirt; and, like the Escrick Man-Woman, she bore a witch's besom. Moreover, under her veil she had a

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[55] Ibid., III, 74.

[56] Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 173-85.

blackened face. Her costume, meanwhile, included one white stocking[57] and one black. The Winster character, therefore, combined the costume attributes of the Escrick witch with the characteristics of the Black Man, the Hobby Horse, and the Man-Woman. Such a fusion would seem to make her cult origins clear. The possibility that these origins are accurately deduced is reinforced by the fact that she is straightforwardly called "The Witch."[58]

The characters at Escrick and Winster are not the only ones to be identified as witches in the dialogue and stage directions. Another appeared in the Morris dance at Mumby, in Lincolnshire. Unfortunately, the dialogue of the exhibition has not been recorded, but the event is known to have included an exchange between a "Tom Fool" and a "Lady or Witch."[59] A final instance in which a folk play character was specifically identified as a witch can be found in the fragment of the Bassingham Plough Monday play. In that village, the "Foole" appeared in company with the Man-Woman character, who was named Dame Jane, but who the records traditionally refer to as "The Old Witch." In one of the extant scenes, the Witch accuses the Fool of fathering her child, and orders him to "come take your Bastard." His denial of paternity turns into the following threat which

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[57]White was a color extensively employed in both cult and play; see ch. V.

[58]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 74.

[59]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 235.

a witch might well respect.

> Bastard! you Jade it's none of mine,
> It's not a bit like me. . . .
> You never saw me before now did you?
> I slew Ten men with a Seed of Mustard,
> Ten thousand with an old Crush'd Toad.
> What do you think to that, Jane?
> If you don't be of /off/ I'l serve you the same.[60]

The subject is abruptly switched at this point by other characters, and the challenge, fight, and death of the Fool quickly follow. The Witch's response to all this reveals there may have been validity in her paternity complaint since, in the crisis of the Fool's death, she disregards the Fool's previous abuse and says, "Five pounds for a Doctor my husband to cure!"[61] Her use of the word "husband" and her concern for his welfare seem to belie the Fool's disavowal of the Witch. Their apparent previous relationship, together with the Fool's evident knowledge of destructive witch recipes, would tend to tie him to the cult. By these relationships, therefore, still another folk play stock character lays claim to a significant witch cult identity.

The foregoing internal evidence points to the possibility that a variety of the folk play characters had their origin in the cult rites of the witches. For instance, the given names with which cult members were initiated into the fertility religion were, nine times in ten, also those employed in the folk plays. In terms of character

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[60] Ibid., p. 94.

[61] Ibid., p. 95.

identification, the name used in a significant majority of instances was that found to be the most popular of the male cult names. Moreover, village after village incorporated the word "devil" into the name of its Black Man character, and/or employed the term "Beelzebub" as the cognomen of the Fool. Further, textual materials pertaining to the Doctor and the Fool reveal actions and speeches which reinforce the idea that the basic attributes of these characters were originally cult centered.

Finally, and most directly, certain of the folk play characters laid claim to relatives who were witches; other characters were dressed like witches; the Plough Monday folk play ceremonies were called "plough witching," and the stock characters and others who performed these acts were called "plough witchers" or "witch men." In mummers' play, sword play and Morris dance, moreover, characters are identified by the name of "Witch" or "Old Witch." Significantly, when that witch character appears, she gives evidence of relationship to every one of the stock characters. Her marriage links her to the Fool; her implied knowledge of herbal medicine connects her to the Doctor; her androgyny parallels that of the Man-Woman; her black face melds her with the Black Man, and her broom relates her to the Hobby Horse. Consequently, when the witch appears in the English folk play, she summarizes in her

person all those godly attributes previously noted in the stock characters. Collectively, play ingredients become a source of affirmation of the cult lineage of the play characters.

CHAPTER V

CORRELATIVE TRADITIONS

Evidence cited thus far tends to support the thesis that the English folk play was a descendant of the witch cult, and that the stock characters of the folk plays represent various aspects of the witch cult deity. In the event such a relationship did exist, it should be possible to discover other, thus far unnoticed, congruences in attitude and activity.

In this regard, the role played by the sword in the various folk theatre forms merits attention. The dominance of this instrument in the folk drama corpus is suggested by the fact that, even today, many of these performances retain the term "sword" in their title, e.g., sword play or sword dance. An unvarying characteristic of the sword play, one also repeatedly seen in the mummers' play, is the fact that even though other weapons are carried the traditional sacrificial deaths occur through swordplay. For example, in the Leicestershire mummers' play, although Captain Slasher carried a pistol, he fought with a sword.[1] Similarly, in the

[1]Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, p. 355.

earliest extant folk play, one centering upon Robin Hood, that character also fought with a sword despite the fact the bow was his traditional weapon.[2]

In addition to its use as an instrument of death, the sword was also employed in the insults and challenges typical of the folk play. For example, in the mummers' play at Leicestershire, after the introduction of the characters and with customary lack of provocation, the Turkish Knight says to Prince George: "That man's a fool, / Who wears a wooden sword!" George replies, "A wooden sword, you dirty dog! / My sword is made of the best of metal free. / If you would like to taste of it, I'll give it unto thee. . . . I'll cut you down the middle, and make your blood to fly."[3] Thereupon the two characters fight with their swords and George is mortally wounded.

Although the sword is invariably the sword plays' instrument of death, it should also be noted that, conversely, it becomes an implement critical to the resurrection which must be enacted in the play; without death, rebirth is impossible. At times, however, the sword was more directly involved in the climactic, regenerative event. In such instances it became the actual tool or agent by which the rebirth was effected. This was true, for instance, in the

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[2] Ibid., p. 345. The play, a fragment, is dated c.1475.

[3] Ibid., pp. 355-56.

mummers' play at Belfast[4] and in the period's most elaborate sword play at Ampleforth. In the latter drama, the Doctor made a rather lengthy appearance following the symbolic death, but it was the Fool who brought the victim back to life by means of his sword. The Fool accomplished the feat by "putting his sword to the dead man's throat," and after drawing "it down the middle of his body. . . . the dead man comes to life."[5]

It is also pertinent to observe that, in addition to its regenerative function, the sword had a conspicuous role or place in the Morris dance processional. In such places as Kidlington, Wychwood, Bampton and elsewhere, there existed what seems to have been a ritually consecrated form of cake to which much importance was attached. Significantly, the sword was chosen to display this ceremonial food. The cake was impaled on the sword, then carried aloft throughout the procession by one of the participants.[6]

It is apparent, then, that the sword had a place of importance in mummers' play, sword play and Morris dance alike. Similar prominence was assigned to the sword in the cult of the witches, and cult initiates are known to have credited the sword with a wide variety of magical properties.

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[4]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 142.

[5]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 76.

[6]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 28, 112; III, 38, 39.

For instance, because of qualities inhering in iron, it was believed the sword could control evil spirits, and, indeed, this view survives in parts of Scotland even today.[7] The Directorium Inquisitorium of Nicholas Emeric, written about 1376, affirmed that the sword was used in a variety of witches' invocations "and many other acts."[8] Modern studies, such as the one by Gardner, bear out the fact that the sword typically was believed to have magical properties and that, consequently, it became an object of veneration, particularly in the cult's initiatory rites.[9] The fact that the sword was accounted a significant instrument in cult practice is revealed in the case of Roger Bolinbroke, a relapsed cleric accused of a variety of magical practices. When imprisoned, Bolinbroke's

> instruments were seized with him when he was arrested, and were displayed about him when he was exposed on a scaffold against Paul's Cross. . . . the magical sword in his right hand, and the magical rod in his left. . . . there were other swords at each corner of the chair.[10]

The supernatural capacities of the sword and the rites through which they were acquired were referred to repeatedly in Renaissance treatises on magic such as The Key of Solomon

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[7]J. E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols (New York, 1962), p. 307.

[8]Lea, Materials, I, 210; Baroja, World, p. 92.

[9]Gardner, Witchcraft Today, pp. 26, 36, 44, 94ff.

[10]Williams, Witchcraft, p. 106.

and True Black Magic.[11] When the various types of evidence are considered, it is possible to conclude that the sword played an important role in the witch cult, a role that may have prompted the adoption of that instrument for the rituals of the folk theatre.

Another traditional feature of English folk play custom was the mirror. Mirrors seem to have been used as decorative elements for the costumes of many folk play performers. The Morris dancers, for example, traditionally affixed small mirrors or bits of mirror to their costumes. Folk dance authority Douglas Kennedy affirms the commonness of the practice, noting that mirrors were "universally associated with" the Morris dance.[12] Interestingly, Kennedy further observes that "looking glasses are used to decorate. . . the head gear on Morris dancers."[13] The practice of fastening mirrors to the dancers' hats not only occurred regularly in the Morris dance, but it extended to the mummers' plays as well. This fact is indicated in an account which William Sandys, an old Cornwall

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[11]Wedeck, Treasury, pp. 95-96; Edward Arthur Waite, The Book of Ceremonial Magic (New York, 1961), pp. 154-61. The sword as magical instrument seems universal, King Arthur's Excaliber being perhaps most famous to Western readers. The magical sword asserts itself in Hebrew tradition in the book of magic, Sword of Moses; see E. A. Wallis Budge, Amulets and Talismans (New York, 1961), p. 486. Frazer, New Golden Bough, p. 71, records a life-controlling sword legend in Cambodia. The sword was also endowed with sacred, magical properties in ancient Sythia, Greece, Rome, China and elsewhere; see Cirlot, Symbols, pp. 307-09.

[12]Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 49.

[13]Ibid., p. 94.

native, gave of a mummers' performance more than a century ago. According to Sandys, the actors were attired in "sich caps as I never seed. . . . made of pastyboord, weth powers of beads and loaking glass."[14] The custom of wearing mirrors or incorporating them into the costume was not limited to the Morris dancers and mummers. The sword play performers also employed mirrors as a costume element. In such places as Hunton, for instance, "small mirrors were placed on breast and back" of the actors.[15]

Not only was the mirror used pervasively in the folk theatre tradition, but it appears with similar frequency in witch cult usage. Indeed, mirrors were so often and intimately associated with the cult that, in some places, witches wore mirrors in their hats[16]--a custom duplicating the folk play tradition, and one which may explain Ben Jonson's definition of a mirror as "a small glass formerly worn in the hat by men and in the girdle by women."[17] The very definition of the word "mirror" in Middle English was "a magic glass or crystal,"[18] a fact plainly indicative of the general belief that the looking glass had supernatural properties.

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[14]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 83.

[15]Ibid., p. 126.

[16]Lea, Materials, I, 252.

[17]Oxford Universal Dictionary (Oxford, 1955), entry under mirror.

[18]Ibid.

The magical properties widely ascribed to the mirror[19] may suggest the commonness with which it was employed in the witch cult.[20] The church, in its indictments and attacks upon the witch cult, made sufficient reference to the witches' use of mirrors to indicate the extent to which the looking glass was considered a functional cult property. As early as the twelfth century, for example, John of Salisbury recorded the witches' practice of divining in "various kinds of mirrors."[21] In 1318, Pope John XXII ordered the trial of nine witches because, "using mirrors and images they have frequently invoked spirits. . . they have confined spirits in mirrors."[22] Another edict, in 1326 or 1327, deplored that "many Christians" still were seduced into cult activities, in which they would "enclose demons in. . . mirrors," while, in 1470, Johannes Nider rebuked those who held beliefs regarding "things seen. . . in mirrors."[23] In a case of

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[19]The mirror was regarded as magical on the Continent, too. Leonardo da Vinci drew a witch making use of a magic mirror; Seligmann, History of Magic, p. 249. Beliefs surrounding the mirror recall those of the sword; the mirror seems also to have been universally viewed as a magical device. These beliefs were found to persist among the Etruscans, the Chinese, the Greeks, the Hebrews and certain African tribes; see Leland, Etruscan Magic, p. 93; Shah, Oriental Magic, pp. 151-52; Frank Chapin Bray, The World of Myths (New York, 1935), p. 74; Budge, Amulets, p. 215.

[20]Lea, Materials, I, 128, 210; II, 498, 500; Williams, Witchcraft, p. 209.

[21]Wedeck, Treasury, p. 234.

[22]Lea, Materials, I, 220; see also Montague Summers, Witchcraft and Black Magic (London, 1945), pp. 77-78.

[23]Lea, Materials, I, 221, 271.

witchcraft involving the Earl of Essex and the Countess of Somerset in 1613, a mirror was said to have been employed as a fertility-invoking device.[24] Plainly, then, the mirror was an important ritual accessory in the cult of the witches.

It has been shown that the sword and mirror played a prominent role in folk play and witch cult alike. One aspect of their use, moreover, serves to strengthen the possibility that their appearance in the two traditions was more than coincidental, and that the folk theatre may have borrowed these ritually venerated objects from the witch cult. The phenomenon in question is the tendency for the two magical items to merge identity and interchange terms or labels, a tendency that recalls the shape-shifting capacities of both the cult god and the stock characters. In the folk plays, the merger can be seen in the sacrificial dance figure of the sword play. During this sacrificial dance configuration, the life of its ritual victim was taken in a distinctive series of movements called the "Mirror" or the "Glass."[25] The "Mirror" was the end product of a movement called the "Lock" which, as its name suggests, was an interlocking of sword points through the hand guard and hilt of the adjoining sword. The participants, arranged in a

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[24]Williams,,Witchcraft, p. 209.

[25]The pattern has other names, but the terms "Mirror" and "Glass" are common, being used at such places as Escrick, Sleights and Revesby; see Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 22; III, 31; Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, p. 358ff.; Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 61.

circle, moved within arm's length to connect their weapons as described. The result was a self-supporting arrangement of swords, usually hexagonal or octagonal, depending upon the number of performers.[26]

The interlocked weapons which constituted the "Mirror" were held aloft by one character and then placed over the head of the intended sacrificial figure. In a minor variation of the procedure, the victim sometimes took the initiative and thrust his own head through the "Mirror" or "Glass." The position was maintained for a moment, and then, at a signal from the leader, or upon completing a certain number of bars of music, the participants grasped their swords and drew them sharply away, producing a clashing sound. With that, the sacrificial figure fell to the ground, ritually dead. Douglas Kennedy described this moment in a twentieth century sword dance.[27] He noted that the leader, who was the intended victim, wore a rabbit-skin cap,

> with the head of the animal set in front. . . the Leader. . . kneels down in the centre, and after the 'Lock' /'Mirror'/ has been placed around his neck, the swords are drawn. His cap of skin is knocked off in the process and rolls on the ground, looking horribly like a decapitated head.[28]

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[26]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 129.

[27]It is worth noting that one Olaus Magnus described the same kind of sacrifice and sword dance in 1555, and Kennedy asserts that this description "would be apt for any of the surviving Yorkshire dances;" see Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 68.

[28]Ibid., pp. 63-64.

The "Mirror" of swords was the symbolic device or emblem used to complete the climactic sacrifice of the victim in the sword play.

In addition to this fusion of mirror and sword, note should be taken of the repetition of the circular pattern which constituted the "Mirror" of swords. Specifically, the sword dance was a ring dance which traditionally moved in a circular fashion.[29] Moreover, the process of interlocking the swords to form the "Mirror" required the tightening or contracting of this circle of performers. Thus, as the sword dance approached its climax, the circle of figures around the victim contracted, producing a decided emphasis upon that individual and adding a maximum degree of tension to the play's kinetic ingredients. It should be kept in mind, also, that as the circular pattern of the figures evolved and achieved maximum distinction it was duplicated aloft by the circle of sword blades which constituted the "Mirror."[30] The circular shape of that sword pattern was, in fact, emphasized by an alternate term sometimes used to designate the "Mirror" or "Glass." When the latter terms were not employed, the figure was often called the "Ring." The name "Ring" was applied to the intermeshed circle of swords at such places as Ampleforth, Handsworth, Askham

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[29] Ibid., pp. 37, 42; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 8.

[30] Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 94.

Richard, Flamborough, Winlaton and North Walbottle.[31] Thus, when the swords were interlaced for the climactic sacrifice, the process was indicated by three names--"Mirror," "Glass," and "Ring."

In terms of the sword's association with the ring, it should be noted that at such places as Wharfdale and Durham one of the actors (the Fool at Wharfdale) "began the performance by drawing a circle with his sword."[32] Only then were the characters introduced "in turn, each walking round the circle to music."[33] The ring or circle created by a sword thus became the starting point for the dance and, subsequently, its center or focal point as well. The process of drawing this focal ring with the sword seems to have been a traditional feature of the sword dance.[34]

While it has already been established that the sword and mirror were widely exploited by cult initiates, attention has not been directed toward the fact that the function or potential of these ritual implements tended to merge in cult practice. Because of their reflective surfaces, both the sword and the mirror were used extensively for the purpose of divination. As may be recalled from Chapter II,

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[31]Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 29-31, 37-38; III, 38-39, 46, 64, 85, 96-97, 102, 115.

[32]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 193.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., I, 216.

divination was one of the aspects of cult worship most often condemned by Christian authorities from the days of the Augustine mission onward. In that early period, most of the cult's divining seems to have been done in the reflective surface of wells--"well-worshipings."[35] With the passage of time, however, the process of divining seems increasingly to have involved portable objects, particularly the reflective blade of the magical sword and the most perfectly reflective of surfaces, the mirror. As early as the twelfth century, John of Salisbury recorded the practice of witches divining with "swords. . . and various kinds of mirrors,"[36] and in 1376, Emeric's Directorium similarly condemned the use of a "mirror /or/ sword" in divinatory practice.[37] Details of the fifteenth century case of Roger Bolinbroke reveal that he had used both a "magical sword" and reflective "copper images" in his efforts to divine details of the Duchess of Gloucester's future.[38] While the iron blade of the sword was less than perfectly reflective, its use in divination is readily understood when it is remembered iron was presumed to have the power to control the

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[35]The phrase is drawn from the ecclestical canons of King Edgar in 959, cited in Murray, Witch Cult, p. 23.

[36]Wedeck, Treasury, p. 234.

[37]Lea, Materials, I, 210.

[38]Williams, Witchcraft, pp. 105-06.

evil spirits which were sometimes invoked.[39] Such evidence makes it possible to see that, for the magical purposes of the cult rites, the sword blade "became" a mirror and functioned interchangeably with the actual mirror in these revelatory practices.

In addition, it is appropriate to note that in cult practice the divinatory magic of sword or mirror was ordinarily associated with some kind of ring or circular object. That association derived from the fact that the spirit being invoked by the mirror or sword was believed to be captive in, or controlled by, a magic circle within which the sword or mirror had been placed. Emeric, for example, recorded that "a circle is described. . . and an object such as a mirror, a sword or a vase" would be put inside it,[40] while Pope John XXII said, "using mirrors and images, they [the accused witches] have frequently invoked spirits in circles. . . they have confined spirits in mirrors and rings."[41] A papal edict of 1326 deplored the belief that it was possible to "enclose demons in rings [and] mirrors,"[42] and about 1475, Jean Vincent rebuked those who attempted to enclose "demons

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[39]Cirlot, Symbols, p. 307.

[40]Lea, Materials, I, 210.

[41]Ibid., I, 220; see also Summers, Witchcraft and Black Magic, pp. 77-78.

[42]Lea, Materials, I, 221.

in rings."[43] Insofar as modern testimony is concerned, Gardner asserts that the magic circle was a permanent part of the ceremonial activity of the witches,[44] and the Castletown Museum in England exhibits a reproduction of this kind of ceremonial ring.[45]

Such evidence seems to invite several conclusions. It is apparent that circles were part of the ritualistic magic of the cult. Moreover, these circles seem to have been used to contain the spirits invoked in the blades of swords or in mirrors. There was in existence in the cult an interdependent ritualistic preoccupation with mirror, sword and circle which was distinctly similar to that found in the folk play.

With the relationship and symbolic function of the sword, "Ring," "Glass" and "Mirror" in mind, and remembering the extent to which the folk play duplicates the magical and ritualistic role which the cult assigned to these objects, an item from the Revesby sword play should be considered. In that village, after the "Mirror" of swords was formed, one character, the son, suddenly and without provocation or preparation told his father he and his brothers had "all concluded to cut off your head." Although his father, the Fool, voiced an objection, he ultimately capitulated and said, "If I must die, I will dye with my face to the

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[43] Ibid., I, 303.

[44] Gardner, Witchcraft Today, pp. 114-15, 125.

[45] Ibid., photograph facing p. 81.

light for all of you."[46] With that, he knelt; the "Mirror" was placed round his neck; and the death and revival were enacted. In their dramatic context, the Fool's last words are inexplicable. Items such as the Fool's offer to die with his face "to the light" take on meaning, however, when one considers the sword blades encircling his head and the parallel between their reflective surface and the magic object from which the pattern of interlocked swords received its name. Further understanding of the Fool's dying words, and of the persistent, coalescent appearance of ring, sword and mirror, may be gained from a consideration of the role these objects had been assigned in witch cult use. Considered in this light, the lines of the Fool could mean that he believed his death by means of such magical instruments would not be a dark and senseless thing, but that, because of these implements' nature, his death would become revelatory and illuminating. Death by the sacred sword would insure the vision which the sacred mirror could provide, the vision that death is illusory.

The sacrificial deaths of other plays, when enacted by means of the ringed "Mirror" of swords, could be similarly interpreted. First, the sacrificial instrument of the plays was made of iron; hence, its use presumably could have kept evil spirits under control or rendered them impotent. Secondly, since the sword was an illuminating and revealing

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[46]Adams, Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, pp. 359-60.

property, a sword death enacted with proper rites would inevitably have suggested to those knowledgeable in cult matters that death was transitory and controllable. Folk play deaths, of course, suggested exactly this; sacrifices by the sword yielded the spectators a vision of rebirth and new life.

The shared veneration and traditional use of sword, mirror and ring in cult and play indicates the possibility of a cult ritual provenance for the folk drama. That possibility can be extended by examining the congruence of folk and witch patterns in the matter of sacrifice. It has already been seen that cult and play shared a ritual tradition of human sacrifice in the death and revival of the god and the stock character who appears to have represented that god. In addition to that kind of sacrifice, however, there seem to have been instances in both witch cult and folk play wherein an animal sacrifice actually occurred.

A 1679 account of a folk celebration and Morris dance at Kidlington, Oxfordshire, described one instance of animal sacrifice as follows:

> the Custom is, That on Monday after Whitsun week, there is a fat live Lamb provided, and the Maids of the Town having their thumbs ty'd behind them, run after it, and she that with her mouth takes and holds the Lamb is declared Lady of the Lamb, which, being dress'd with the skin hanging on, is carried on a long Pole before the Lady and her Companions to the Green, attended with Music

> and a Morisco Dance of Men, and another of Women, where the rest of the day is spent in dancing, mirth and merry glee.[47]

A similar ceremony was celebrated at Kirtlington in the week following Whitsun. In this instance the animal sacrifice took place at

> the rendezvous of the Morris teams of that neighborhood. The Morris men were preceded by a shepherd in a clean white smock leading a lamb deck'd out in ribbons, and every morning they danced 'Bonny Green Garters' round the shepherd and his lamb. On Wednesday in Whitsun week the lamb was killed and afterwards eaten by the dancers.[48]

A more primitive example of that sacrificial custom was practiced in Wychwood. Here the event, which took place in Whitsun week, occurred in the form of a deer hunt.

> The villagers were not allowed to bring firearms. . . . When a deer was captured, the first man in at the death had the right to cut its throat and to keep the neck and head for himself. . . . Each day after the hunt was over the Morris men went out and danced.[49]

A final instance, although it does not exhaust the possibilities,[50] can be seen at the village of Holne in Devonshire. A ram was the sacrificed animal, and it "was slain at a

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[47]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 12. "Next day," of course, the lamb was "bak'd, boyl'd and rost for the Ladies feast."

[48]Ibid., I, 25; see also Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 77.

[49]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 27.

[50]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 140-41, lists others, including the ceremonial slaying of bulls and sheep.

granite pillar or ancient altar," again on an annual basis.[51] Within the folk tradition, then, animal sacrifice appears to have been a regularly recurring event, one which habitually became attached to the Morris dance and employed its attendant stock characters.

Considering the parallels between the two traditions, it can be said there is an abundance of evidence of animal sacrifice in the witch cult. Indeed, it is found in the earliest witch trial to be held in the British Isles, that of Dame Alice Kyteler in 1324. Dame Alice was "charged to haue nightlie conference with a spirit called Robin Artisson, to whom she sacrificed in the high waie .ix. red cocks."[52] At Chelmsford, in 1566, Mother Waterhouse gave the devil "a chicken which he fyrste required of her, and a drop of her blood."[53] Her daughter, Joan, offered "a red kocke," while Alexander Hamilton told of giving "an kat or ane laif or ane dog or any uther sic beast he come be."[54] As in the folk tradition, animal offerings in the cult were often on an annual basis. In 1566, for example, John Walsh of Dorset affirmed that the devil told him "hee must geue hym some lyuing thing, as a Chicken, a Cat or a Dog. And further he

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[51] Ibid., I, 140.

[52] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 154; see also Gardner, Witchcraft Today, p. 98.

[53] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 154.

[54] Ibid., p. 155.

sayth he must geue hym twoo lyuing thynges onco a yeare."[55] In 1625, John Cotta's book, Infallible, true and assured Witch, recorded still other descriptions of the cult's sacrificial practices.

> Some bring their cursed Sorcery vnto their wished end, by sacrificing vnto the Diuell some liuing creatures. . . one confessed to haue offered vnto his Deuill or Spirit a Beetle. . . . bloudy sacrifices /are made/ not only of other creatures, but euen of men, wherewith in ancient times the heathen pleased their gods, which were no other than Diuels.[56]

While occasion, rather than date, seems to have governed animal sacrifice in the cult, Murray's statement that the event took place for only two reasons, "to obtain help or as a thank offering,"[57] should be kept in mind. The latter function serves to strengthen the possibility of a link between play and cult, since the spring folk festivals were an annual occasion for rejoicing at which an animal sacrifice quite logically could, or would, be made. The fact that animal sacrifice did occur in cult and play, of course, seems beyond question.

Another tradition mutual to both folk play and witch cult is noticeable in the persistent use of certain symbolic colors. The color black, of course, asserted itself

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 154; see also Lea, Materials, I, 212, 219, 224; II, 606-07; Hole, Witchcraft, pp. 25-26, 70, for other instances of animal sacrifice.

[57] Murray, Witch Cult, p. 154.

continually in both cult and play, being found in black apparel as well as in the ubiquitous black face. The colors white and red, however, were used with sufficient frequency and in unique enough ways to call attention to themselves. Indeed, together, the colors black, white and red account for a clear preponderance of the color motifs found in the folk play costumes.

The basic costume color of the folk play was white, with black often set off against it. A striking example of that type of color contrast can be found in accounts of the performance in the village of Bacup. There the participants blackened all areas of exposed skin, and, in addition, wore black basic garments with white caps, broad white suspenders, short white skirts and white stockings.[58] The commonest folk play costume element, of course, was the white shirt or smock, often paired with white trousers.[59] On the Isle of Man, for example, white garments were so typical that the folk plays' actors came to be known as "White Boys."[60]

With respect to the use of the color red, it was frequently combined with the black and white costume elements. The white shirts at Escrick had crimson collars and

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[58]Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 47.

[59]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 200-01, 219; Kennedy, England's Dances, pp. 49-50; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 83, 90, 126; Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 91-92, 103; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 30, 32-33, 107-08; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 98.

[60]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 84.

cuffs, for example, and at Ampleforth, red tunics were worn with the white trousers, while in the Askham Richard play, the "white tunics and white ducks" were both trimmed in red.[61] The Bledington Fool, like the Winster Witch, wore one black and one white stocking, while the Haxby performers' costume consisted of white shirts, black trousers with a red stripe, and a red cap.[62] At Cropwell, Notts, moreover, "horses cut out in black or red" adorned the traditional white shirts,[63] while the Sleights performers--who wore red tunics--extended the use of the traditional three colors to their beards, which were always black, white or red.[64] In addition, the Plough Monday play at Northants featured red garments which were so closely identified with the "Jacks," or Fools, that these characters were traditionally known as "Red Jacks."[65]

On the basis of available descriptions, it would seem justifiable to conclude that the basic color conventions operative in the folk play costumes centered upon the colors white, red and black. Since the consistent appearance of these colors in the folk play has a distinct counterpart

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[61]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 20, 50-51, 77.

[62]Ibid., III, 86; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 74; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 47.

[63]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209.

[64]Sharp, Sword Dances, II, 13-14.

[65]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209.

in witch cult practice, another possible inheritance from the cult is suggested. The insistent association of the color black with the witch cult, of course, has already been established. In terms of the color red, it has been suggested earlier that the blood sacrifice of the witches may have provided some basis for the cult's preoccupation with that hue. The witch was, after all, in repeated ritual contact with blood, since it was used for such purposes as baptism, initiation, making covenant with the god, and fertility invocation. Moreover, the witches' familiars were very often fed with blood, while the witch herself commonly made offerings of her own blood, and used the substance in a variety of other rituals as well.[66] Indeed, it may have been from frequent references to blood that the Renaissance witches' manuscript of curative recipes and magic derived its name, The Red Book of Appin.[67]

In other cult practices, the color red played an equally prominent role. The earliest British witch trial, in 1324, made pointed reference to the fact that Dame Alice Kyteler was required to sacrifice ".ix. red cocks" to the local deity, while, in 1566, Joan Waterhouse offered "a red kocke"

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[66]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 80ff., 152ff., 209ff.; Hole, Witchcraft, pp. 105, 107; Lea, Materials, I, 212.

[67]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 170, 192; Montague Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology (New York, 1956), pp. 86-87; Wedeck, Treasury, p. 95. The commonness of the color red in cult tradition is also represented in the title of Davidson's witch cult study, Rowan Tree and Red Thread.

to her incarnate god.[68] Apart from such sacrifices, one cult gathering was recorded as having featured "Red Bread and Red Drink."[69] Moreover, red was one of the colors conventionally adopted by the cult god in his apparel.[70] The color became popularly associated with him, and, in addition to his other garments, the god figure seems often to have adopted a red cap.[71] Nor did those enacting the role of the god always choose subdued shades, for even "bright red," according to one authority, "was not uncommon."[72] One of few "authentic contemporary portraits," from the seventeenth century, depicts a witch subject wearing a green hood with bells on it, and a red coat.[73] It is the conclusion of one scholar that "Red--the color of blood--is and always has been. . . pre-eminently the witch color."[74] In view of the commonness of black in cult custom, it may be questioned whether red was "the witch color," at least to the degree that Williamson asserts. Considering the volume of

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[68]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 154, 155.

[69]Ibid., p. 151.

[70]Ibid., pp. 41, 66, 183.

[71]Ibid., p. 40; Lea, Materials, III, 1511.

[72]Masters, Eros, p. 14.

[73]The opinion as to authenticity is Murray's, cited in Gardner, Witchcraft Today, p. 144. The bells also parallel folk usage, inasmuch as bells were unvarying accoutrements of the Morris dancers.

[74]Williamson, Arrow, p. 110; see also Graves, White Goddess, pp. 171, 175-76, for added dimension to the significance of red in English cult use.

references available, however, it seems safe to conclude that red was sanctioned by witch cult tradition in a variety of uses. The cult's frequent and characteristic use of the color red, and the resulting supernatural or ritualistic associations accruing to the color, suggest a highly probable explanation for the continued use of the color in the English folk theatre, particularly in relation to the Fool.

The witch cult's employment of the color white was similarly recurrent. The role it played in the cultists' activities is suggested by the fact that Emeric's fourteenth century Directorium asserted that the mere act of donning white garments in invocation and adoration of the cult god constituted heresy.[75] In fact, the white robe seems widely to have been regarded as a pagan garment,[76] and it was frequently reported that the cult deity himself wore white. In 1596, the trial of Ellen Gray included testimony which affirmed that "the Devill, thy maister, apperit to thee in the scheap of ane agit man, beirdit, with a quhyt gown."[77] About the same time, Andro Man asserted that his god came to him "in liknes of ane fair angell, and clad in quhyt claythis"; appropriately, this god figure also rode a white horse.[78] Isobel Smith met the devil in white garments in 1661, as did

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[75]Lea, Materials, I, 210; it is unclear whether the act remained heresy in the absence of white clothes.

[76]Williamson, Arrow, pp. 113-14.

[77]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 35-36.

[78]Ibid., pp. 36, 45.

John Fian in his first meeting with the North Berwick deity in 1590. Later, however, Fian's deity appeared "appareled all in blacke, with a white wande in his hand."[79] In 1597, Marion Grant met the devil's consort "cled in a quhyt walicot," and the god himself carried "ane quhyt candill;" elsewhere it is reported that Jonet Rendall's deity appeared "clad in quhyt cloathis with ane quhyt head."[80] While testimony such as this is common, a final case may be in order since it furnishes a provocative reminder of the black and white costume elements of the Morris or sword dances. From Ayrshire, in 1576, Bessie Dunlop reported the god came to her with "quhyte shankis, gartanit aboue the kne; ane blak bonet. . . and ane quhyte wand in his hand."[81] Clearly, then, the god of the witches associated himself often and closely with the color white, as he had with the colors black and red.

To conclude this search for a cult significance for the dominant color motifs observed on the folk play characters, it will be helpful to consider a cult usage recorded by the

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[79] Ibid., pp. 35, 37, 57.

[80] Ibid., pp. 36, 40, 45.

[81] Ibid., p. 35. Not only are the costume elements in the cult reminiscent of the dances, but the folk dancers, when not using swords or white handkerchiefs, also carried sticks or wands, and, like the Ayrshire god's "quhyte wand," or the "white wande" of the North Berwick deity, the folk wands were also painted white, if not left unfinished, or painted black or red: see Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 42; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 32; II, 45; III, 89.

inquisitor, Nicolas Remy, in 1595. Remy testified that the devil gave each new cult member, upon initiation, three powders, one for killing, one for sickening, and one for healing. Respectively, according to their functions, these powders were "black. . . reddish, and. . . white."[82] If the colors black, red and white were, as this would indicate, respectively symbolic of the devil's control of death, illness and life, and if the plays sought to mirror, or allude to, that pagan figure and his powers, the introduction and repeated use of those colors would have been appropriate since they would have served as a reminder of the attributes he possessed. In short, if the folk plays were attempts to present, and thus preserve, critical aspects of the cult deity, the colors black, red and white would seem a necessary part of that presentation. Interestingly, these symbolic colors were not only present, but dominant in the plays and in the costume of the stock characters of those plays.

Another consideration relevant to a discussion of practices co-existing in folk play and witch cult is that pertaining to the use of masks. While animal masks were suggested in connection with the animal disguise of both the play characters and the god, another kind of masking, one which might be termed "disguise masking," was also practiced in the cult and plays. Disguise masking may be understood as any process whereby the wearer's visage is

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[82]Lea, Materials, II, 605.

substantially altered, usually by means of a physically separate, crafted mask, or by extensive face-painting. In terms of this item, the blackened face is the most apparent and widespread example of masking, either by the cult god or the stock characters. This kind of disguise did not attempt to represent any other creature, but, instead, it existed for the sake of its properties as a disguise, or for its symbolic value, or both.

It hardly seems useful to cite extensive evidence to show that masks were used in folk plays whose performers were traditionally called mummers or guisers. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the conventions attached to those masks extend the color associations and symbolism discussed above. In addition to the black face of the Black Man character, the colors red and white were exhibited prominently and purposefully on the visages of the mummers. As a case in point, it can be noted the red face mask was often exhibited by the Fool. At Hollington, for instance, the Fool commented upon this trait by rhyming on his name, Hy Gwyer, "with my face red as fire."[83] Chambers speculates about the strange name, "Rim Rhu," which was used by the red-faced Fool at Dundalk. His conclusion is that "Rhu may represent the Irish ruad, 'red.'"[84] In the mummers' play at Ballybrennan, two Fools appeared, and one of them, the traditional

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[83]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 33.

[84]Ibid., p. 14.

Beelzebub, appeared in a red mask instead of having the accustomed black face; the other Fool had his face painted red.[85] The color red was also used in conjunction with the masks used to establish the double identity so often manifested by the folk characters. Specifically, it involved the use of half-masks, as in the case of the Kempsford mummers' play, where the Fool, Tom Pinny, wore a half mask over the upper part of his face and exposed the lower half, "which was painted red."[86] In another instance which involved mixing attributes, the mask of the Padstow Hobby Horse was painted with "sinister black and red decorations."[87]

In addition to the masking, reddening or blackening of the stock characters' faces, there were occasions on which they were purposefully whitened, a practice also related to the characters' tendency to merge with each other. For example, in the Abington Morris dance, the Fool had his "face floured." The masking did not end there, however, and the Fool's face was then "dashed with red paint."[88] The Cornwall mummers' play, according to one resident's account, featured a Doctor who was masked by having "es face all

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[85] Ibid., p. 85.

[86] Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 248. The italics are Tiddy's, but he offers no explanation for the practice.

[87] Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 124; Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209.

[88] Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 111.

rudded and whited."[89] Like the reddening process, the custom of using a white substance to mask the face was sufficiently entrenched to allow its survival into the twentieth century.[90] Although the mask usually seems to have been created by applying either flour or white paint, occasionally, as at Leicestershire, paper masks were used. These were either painted or allowed to stay white.[91] The mask, therefore, was not only a regular and critical ingredient in the folk plays, but also, within its conventions, the previously noted color symbolism survived.

In terms of a possible cult origin for this disguising process, there are numerous instances involving the witches' use of masks which warrant examination. In 1595, for example, the inquisitor Remy asserted that all members in attendance at cult meetings went masked.[92] Another inquisitor, Martin del Rio, concurred on this point, saying that the witches "appear at the banquet sometimes with the face uncovered, sometimes covered by a veil, cloth, or even masked."[93] By way of a more specific instance, in 1590, John Fian led a ritual dance at North Berwick while wearing

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[89]Chambers, English Folk Play, p. 83.

[90]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 209; Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, III, 111.

[91]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 197-98.

[92]Lea, Materials, II, 608.

[93]Baroja, World, p. 120; see also p. 192; Seligmann, History of Magic, p. 246.

a mask.[94] According to Murray's record of a 1614 conclave, all 200 of the witches present were masked, and "the witches themselves admitted that they were masked and veiled, and the evidence of other witnesses goes to prove the same."[95] As has been mentioned, of course, the devil figure often went masked, and, indeed, extended the tradition to include the use of two masks--one mask covering his face, and another covering his posterior.[96] Like the stock characters and other folk play performers, witches were masked when performing their ceremonial dances.[97] In consequence of facts such as these, there may be justice in Murray's conclusion that "it is probable that the masking and veiling were for ritual purposes."[98]

Although testimony to the nature of the disguise afforded by the witches' masking is more limited than that which attests to its use, there is evidence that, in addition to blackening the face, the witches and their god sometimes used a process which rendered the countenance white.[99] Evidence also reveals one god figure who had a

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[94]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 232.

[95]Ibid., pp. 231, 246.

[96]Ibid., pp. 10, 62, 68-69, 129, 247; Masters, Eros, p. 23; Lea, Materials, II, 517.

[97]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 231-33; Baroja, World, p. 120.

[98]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 231; see also pp. 55ff., 110ff.

[99]Masters, Eros, p. 84.

red and white mask or painted face, while another was described as being "pied"--probably black and white.[100] However limited, the available testimony suggests a clear parallel between the witches' masks or disguises and the facial disguise of the folk characters. Since the colors found in the masks of the witch rites are those to which the cult had attached a fertility significance, their appearance or reappearance in the masks of the actors serves as another link between the English folk play's characters and the witch cult.

Another congruency between folk play and witch cult emerges when the beliefs and customs involving trees or wood are considered. Three different kinds of wood can be seen to have had a distinctive role in folk theatricals. Significantly, that same wood or tree was also singled out by the witch cult for special attention.

One example of this parallel can be found in the Morris dance which accompanied the raising of the Maypole each spring at Ducklington, Oxfordshire. The ceremony was always announced by the blowing of special horns of blackthorn and willow, fresh-cut, and made annually for use solely upon that occasion.[101]

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[100]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 41, 129.

[101]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 22, 23-24. It might be asserted that these horns were made of blackthorn and willow because these materials were well-suited to the purpose. They doubtlessly were, but it is possible to construct such signaling devices from a wide variety of

Both of these trees or woods had a strong associational potential when used by the witch cult. The blackthorn was frequently used to make the witches' magic staffs, and at such villages as Galmpton and Dittisham, South Devon, the belief persisted that the blackthorn could destroy fertility and cause miscarriages.[102] This long standing belief in its powers was demonstrated in one of England's most famous witch cases, that of Major Thomas Weir in 1670. His magic blackthorn staff, given him by the local cult devil, was carefully burnt with him as the chief instrument of his power.[103]

At villages like Brailes, Adderbury and Brackley, the willow was additionally used as the material for the Morris sticks, implements sometimes thought to be sword-substitutes.[104] The possible relationship between the choice of willow wood for special folk play implements and its importance within the cult is not difficult to establish. As Graves says, "Its /the willow's/ connexion with

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materials; there was, moreover, probably a trumpet or some other instrument available which would have eliminated the problem of construction and which would assuredly have served to awaken the village, which was the function demanded. Sharp reported, "The horns emitted a penetrating, rasping sound, as loud as hooters." That too was a readily available folk product which could have been used, but was not. The question thus remains as to why, of all things, blackthorn and willow were used--not once, but annually.

[102]Graves, White Goddess, pp. 208-09, 263.

[103]Davidson, Rowan Tree, p. 8; Williams, Witchcraft, pp. 295-98.

[104]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 32; II, 45; III, 85, 89; Kennedy, England's Dances, p. 42. These were the sticks or "wands" previously mentioned which were sometimes painted black, white or red.

witches is so strong in Northern Europe that the words 'witch' and 'wicked' are derived from the same ancient word for willow, which also yields 'wicker'."[105] The willow was used by English witches to bind their besems, for divination, and to effect portions of human sacrificial rites.[106] The magical properties attributed to the willow in cult belief included such varied possibilities as the power to ward off rheumatic cramps and the potential for discovering water sources.[107] Without question, it may be asserted that willow and blackthorn wood was important to both the witch cult and the folk play.

The third wood to be assigned a role of consequence in the folk drama was the ash. When wooden swords were used in plays such as those at Askham Richard and Haxby, the wood employed was traditionally ash.[108] It is pertinent to note here that the ash in British folklore signifies rebirth, a belief traceable to the Celts and Druids who believed that the ash was the tree of life, sacred to Woden.[109] It is

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[105]Graves, White Goddess, p. 177.

[106]Ibid., pp. 177-78, 207.

[107]Ibid.; see also Shah, Oriental Magic, p. 151. The willow was used to divine for water not only in England but all over Europe, and was employed by medieval Chinese witches as well; similar efforts, sometimes called "willow-witching," continue in parts of America today.

[108]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 77, 86.

[109]Graves, White Goddess, p. 172; Ernst Lehner and Johanna Lehner, Folklore and Symbolism of Flowers, Plants and Trees (New York, 1960), pp. 17, 20-21.

perhaps not surprising, therefore, that the ash was commonly used by witches both for divination and as a staff for their brooms. Indeed, the belief in the life-giving powers of the ash survived in the more remote parts of England until the nineteenth century.[110] Thus, in many of the English folk plays, the broom was used to prepare a space for the actors and to revive the fallen victim. At Askham Richard, for example, the Fool was killed with a sword of life-giving ash and revived with the Man-Woman's broom.[111]

If the folk play ceremony was intended to evoke fertility or reflect fertility practices, it seems likely that the materials for such critical objects as the Morris sticks and the wooden swords would have been chosen with some care as to their symbolic or magical values. That being the case, the parallel between the play and cult uses of wood appears to verify previous claims for a cult influence upon the folk plays and their stock characters.

Another meaningful congruence between the folk theatre and witch cult can be found in the realm of dance customs inasmuch as the two kinds of dance found in the folk

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[110]Graves, White Goddess, pp. 47, 172, 177, 207; Spence, Minor Traditions, p. 108; Lea, Materials, III, 1541.

[111]Sharp, Sword Dances, III, 84; Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 15, 16, 22, 33, 127. Interestingly, the three trees chosen may again represent a sort of fertility spectrum: the powers of the blackthorn clearly made it a tree of death; the willow, with its contribution to ritual execution on the one hand and its curative, divinatory and water-seeking qualities on the other, surely combined life and death properties; the ash, of course, was clearly a tree of life.

tradition were also repeated in the witches' ceremonies. Basically, the folk dances were of two types: the ring dance, which, being circular in form, revolved around an object such as the Maypole, and the processional dance, which progressed from point to point, as from the village square to the Maypole site in the churchyard. The Maypole custom had an intimate relationship to the folk theatre inasmuch as the pole was traditionally carried in festive procession to its site, attended by various of the stock characters--most often the Man-Woman, Black Man and Hobby Horse.[112] Arrival at the site usually culminated in a Morris dance around the object of the festive occasion once it had been raised into position. Reports of the festivities at Ducklington, for example, note that, "directly the pole was placed in position, the Morris men danced round it every morning."[113] While this may indicate that Morris dances employed ring configurations--as the sword dances always did[114]--it does not suggest the extent, since ring figures occurred at nearly every village where the Morris dance was performed.[115] This circle

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[112]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 179-80, 195-99.

[113]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 24; see also Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 165.

[114]Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 8.

[115]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 93, 100-01, 113-17; II, 59, 61, 63, 66-68; III, 51-59, 87, 98-102, 104, 116; Sharp, Morris Book, IV, 72-73, 76-78; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 59, 61, 88-91, 106, 110. The

configuration was usually employed as a climactic termination of the dance,[116] and, in addition, the Morris tradition --like the sword dance--called this figure "the Ring." Although the round dance, or ring, was the more common folk form, the Morris dance frequently made use of a processional configuration. Configurations of this type were reported to have been part of the Morris dances in such places as Winster, Castleton and Tideswell in Derbyshire, at Middleton in Lancashire, and at Helston in Cornwall. In keeping with the coalescent quality of the folk plays and their stock characters, in places such as Grampound the processional Morris dance would sometimes halt to incorporate a ring dance, and then later resume the processional figure.[117]

When a comparison is made between the folk theatre dances and those of the witch cult, these circular and processional configurations are found to be duplicated. As was often true in the folk tradition, the witches' processional dance seems to have been "most frequently used to bring the worshippers to the holy place where the round

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villages are: Headington, Ilmington, Adderbury, Bampton, Eynsham, Brackley, Abingdon, Sherbourne, Longborough, Field Town, Bledington, Bucknell and Castleton.

[116]The only exceptions to the ring climax are found at Adderbury, Sherbourne and Longborough; see Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, II, 59-68; Sharp, Morris Book, IV, 63-67, 68-71.

[117]Sharp and MacIlwaine, Morris Book, I, 41, 118; Sharp and Butterworth, Morris Book, V, 11, 13.

dance or 'ring' was to be performed."[118] The processional was thus evidently a common part of witch cult rites and could involve a considerable number of participants.[119] At North Berwick, for example, "all the rest following" numbered "seven score persons."[120] The dance seems to have been a rapid one. Accounts such as those found at Auldearne speak of a witch functionary, sometimes the god himself, whose job it was to bring up the rear of the line and urge along those who lagged. In Murray's opinion, it was usually not the god who performed this duty, but his chief subordinate, an individual like Gideon Penman of Crighton who "was in the rear of all their dances, and beat up those that were slow."[121]

The matter of pace--and punishment--seems also to have been important in the witches' ring dance. For example, in the charges levied against Thomas Leyis in 1597 it was noted:

> Ye all danced about. . . a long space of time; in the which Devil's dance, thou the said Thomas was foremost and led the ring, and dang /knocked down/ the said Kathren Mitchell, because she spoiled your dance and ran not so fast about as the rest.[122]

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[118]Murray, God, p. 109.

[119]Hole, Witchcraft, p. 31; Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 130-35.

[120]Murray, Witch Cult, p. 133.

[121]Ibid.

[122]Ibid., p. 131.

The ring dance of the witches commonly revolved about some symbolic object, such as a tree, standing stone or the god himself.[123] It was not uncommon for these objects to have a phallic significance, as in the case of the Maypole.[124] Typical examples of the cult's use of the round configuration are found in reports on activities at Craigleauch, where initiates "danced all together, about a great stone, under the conduct of Satan, your master," and in the description provided by Danaeus which states, "then fal they to dauncing, wherein he leadeth the daunce, or else they hoppe and daunce merely about him [the devil], singing most filthy songs made in his prayse."[125] As with the folk theatre's dancing, the witches' ring dance seems to have been the more prevalent form. Indeed, the charge of "danceing in ane ring"[126] was lodged against the cult so regularly that, in his Antidote Against Atheism, Henry More proposed that "it might be here very seasonable to enquire into the nature of those large dark Rings in the grass, which they call Fairy Circles, whether they be the Rendezvous of

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[123]Ibid., pp. 107-08, 131; Davidson, Rowan Tree, p. 18; Baroja, World, p. 120, 127-28. It is relevant to note that Maypoles were commonly referred to as "trees"; see Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 180-91.

[124]Williamson, Arrow, pp. 96-97.

[125]Murray, Witch Cult, pp. 131, 137.

[126]Ibid., p. 131. The charge was against Jonet Lucas in 1597.

Witches."[127] The fact that no more than a trampled circle was needed to raise the spectre of witchcraft suggests the commonness of the round dance in cult practice.[128] While the subject of folk and witch dance has by no means been exhausted, the foregoing instances serve to indicate that the round and the processional dance configurations are clearly observable in both witch cult and folk play practice. Moreover, the regular participation of the stock characters in these dances parallels the involvement of the witches' deity in the cult dances.

In summary, it may be said that the English folk play seems to correspond with the witch cult in a variety of ways, not simply through the relationship of the stock characters to the cult god. Ritual devices like sword, mirror, ring, broom and masks may all have entered the folk theatre from the witch cult. These things, persistently used and venerated in the cult, were given equal prominence in the plays where they appear to have retained their cult associations and cult-type magical powers. The same appears to be true in the case of magical woods and symbolic colors, all items associated with regenerative practices in the old fertility cult.

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[127]Henry More, Antidote Against Atheism (London, 1655), p. 232.

[128]Davidson, Rowan Tree, pp. 60-64, contains added material; see also Rose, Razor, p. 47; Baroja, World, p. 106.

In addition to the above, several of the ritual activities performed during the course of these folk dramas can be observed in witch cult usage. The round dance about a venerated object is common to each and the processional dance, often to the festival site, is also mutual. Likewise, both traditions employ (even climactically) conventions such as the sacrifice and the tradition of the disguise. Parallels like these enhance the possibility that rites and beliefs of the witch cult were influential in the evolution and structure of the English folk theatre, and in the development of its constant attendants, the stock characters.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions of this study are largely evident within its constituent chapters. A number of correspondences between the stock characters of the folk play and the witch cult god have been established, along with distinct parallels in the rituals and traditions surrounding these figures. The relationship between play and cult which this evidence reveals provides answers to several unresolved questions regarding the folk theatre, its characters, and its heritage. In addition, it serves as a means of resolving questions pertaining to several perplexing aspects of the early Christian drama.

One of these questions, that pertaining to the seeming inconsistencies in the folk plays, has been addressed several times in the foregoing chapters. Observers have noted deficiencies or a lack of purpose and direction in such matters as dialogue, character, properties or implements, and situation. The possibility revealed in this study, namely that the folk play occasion had purposeful, specific cult-oriented ends, suggests that, rather than simply being aimless or incoherent, the elements form a pattern consistent with the event containing them.

Sufficient correspondences exist to indicate the folk play may have been dedicated to the articulation and preservation of fundamental values of the witches' fertility religion. Since participation in that religion was illegal, heretical and punishable by death, a project publicly asserting its validity clearly demanded delicate handling and covert methods. The makers of the English folk play were therefore faced with a problem. On the one hand, they had to fashion a ritualistic vehicle capable of vigorously and unmistakably asserting the continued vitality of the old religion. On the other hand, since it was no longer possible to make such an assertion openly, they had to ensure that such a statement was, on its surface, sufficiently veiled, innocuous or incomprehensible to avoid unwelcome attention from Christian officialdom.

The solution to the dilemma of these conflicting requirements may be seen in the English folk play, whose puzzling form may have served the dual purpose of concealment and revelation. The garbled language, coalescing characters, shifting patterns, changing implements, unpredictable habits, patternless inclusion or exclusion of dance insured a fluid, adaptable product, one which could easily be tailored to avoid ecclesiastical suspicion while perpetuating the central beliefs of the fertility religion which furnished its origin. In terms of this oblique satisfaction of its basic obligation, it should be noted that,

as this study has attempted to show, the folk play maintained crucial consistencies within the variation, consistencies which hold the basic significance of the performance unchanging and clear.

Within the context of its historical setting, then, the English folk play may be seen as one which courted formlessness to hide its form. In considering the avenues by which that end could be achieved, it is important to examine the matter of language. The garbled or nonsensical nature of much of the folk play textual material has been spoken of in Chapter IV. To blame this garbling upon the laxness of those who were responsible for the oral traditions of the folk play is a possible and popular explanation. When oral traditions are of communal significance, however, they usually are conceded to be examples of consistency and accuracy.[1] It is difficult to accept the assumption that the English folk play is simply a notable exception to this pattern. A more logical explanation, one consistent with the general patterns observed in folk tradition, is that the plays' inconsistencies and variations may have served practical ends. In this regard, it is worth noting that the plays' nonsensical linguistic effect stops short of total incomprehensibility. It is always clear, for example, that the Doctor is vigorously proclaiming the merits of his curative prowess, whatever the foolery of his language. It

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[1]Graves, White Goddess, pp. 9-10, 48-49.

may be, therefore, that in the case of the Doctor's appearance, the garbled speech was simply a device which orally disguised the play's god figure or god equivalent, thus allowing him to manifest himself publicly to the faithful and reassure them of his continued vitality while protecting them from the censorship--or worse--of an autocratic fatherhood of priests.[2]

Perhaps the most important matter to be clarified by the thesis of cult-engendered plays is the presence of the stock characters themselves. While their presence has struck theatrical commentators as puzzling and arbitrary, the correspondences identified in the course of this study suggest they are the central point of the whole exhibition. It seems clear that the plays could have had no existence without the stock characters, since their presence appears to have represented unmistakably the various attributes of the fertility god around whom the entire proceedings revolved. Lacking the five basic aspects of this god, the ceremony would have lost all point and meaning. Moreover, given their flexible nature, the stock characters (god figures) could be accented, subordinated or assigned external features according to local need. Should a visiting bishop object that the Man-Woman smacked of the cult god's notorious androgyny, the folk may have responded by reducing the character's responsibilities

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[2]Such an hypothesis should be understandable in an age which has featured kindred theatrical subterfuge. In Nazi occupied France, Anouilh's Antigone was surely another application of the same method. The occupying Germans saw nothing wrong, but the play was welcomed throughout Paris as an unmistakable assertion of the right to national self-determination.

to a single, brief appearance, thus minimizing his importance or achieving a confusing variation of his character. It is noticeable that the plays often do just this. It is not unusual to discover a village making short shrift of one or another of the stock characters, bringing the figure in without so much as a line to speak. In the present view, the reason for this kind of limitation is not, as is sometimes implied, the blunted sensibilities of the folk mind. Rather, if such characters as the Man-Woman or the Hobby Horse had no words to say, it is because there was no absolute need for them to say anything. The fact of their appearance alone made the crucially needed point. The god had, through that character's appearance, been represented. His horse or his androgynous aspect had established his presence and thereby he had tacitly given approval to the proceedings. At other times, of course, in the same Hobby Horse or Man-Woman manifestation, he might actively intervene to help promote the inevitable conclusion. In short, since they represented various crucial aspects of the cult god, the stock characters had to appear to suggest the god's sanction of the ceremony honoring him.

Having considered the question of justifying the stock characters' appearance in the plays, it is possible to proceed to a consideration of the specific matter of their entrances. It was the folk habit to bring one or more of the stock characters onstage unaccountably and without

motivation. The practice is derogated by scholars like Chambers who, when referring to a pair of typical instances, noted:

> Thus Beelzebub, like the Fool at one point in the Revesby play, often comes in with
> 'Here come I; ain't been yit,
> Big head and little wit.'
> 'Ain't been yit!' Could a more naive explanation of the presence of a 'stock' character on the stage be imagined? Similarly, in Cornwall, the /Man-/ Woman is worked in by making 'Sabra' a persona muta come forward. . . .[3]

This abrupt and, by conventional standards, unnecessary intrusion is one of the hallmarks of the stock characters in folk theatre. Such apparently unmotivated entrances can be understood, however, if one accepts the possibility that the basic action of the play was not, indeed could not have been, fulfilled until the several stock characters had entered to reaffirm the aspects of the deity being celebrated by their symbolic identity or powers. In such circumstances, these entrances may not have been dramatically meaningful, but they were essential to the pagan sub-text of the play which was, in essence, justification for the laughter and rejoicing which they seem in fact to have provoked. There is little doubt that in twentieth century presentations of these plays, this sort of belated, comic entrance is diversionary only. To a sixteenth century audience, sympathetically attuned to the pattern being enacted, however, the late appearance of the Man-Woman or Beelzebub would probably have evoked a

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[3]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 215-16.

response somewhat similar in its appeal to that of the cinema cavalry which arrives at the last moment to save the fort and drive off the Indians. Just as the fort must be rescued, so the revival and rebirth of the folk play had to be sanctioned by the god in his several aspects. In both cases, the laughter and cheering attendant would originally have been that of relief and rejoicing, deteriorating only as belief in the importance of the occasion waned.

It would seem clear, then, that the stock character needed no introduction or justification for his appearance. Moreover, since he represented an aspect of the god, his sudden or unexpected manifestation only provided another confirmation of his natural and desirable ubiquity at the celebration in his honor. It has been noted, also, that in a different, but related, custom, the various villages tended to shift, dissolve and re-shape the stock characters with perfect freedom, seeing no contradiction whatever in the Fool's being a sacrificial victim in one play and the agency for revival in another. Similarly, the Black Man-Woman was frequently called the Fool, a fact which puzzled Chambers, but which must have had clear implications of godhood to a sixteenth century folk audience.[4] The fact

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[4]The view being advanced here and throughout this study is that a revaluation of certain conclusions made by Chambers is warranted, in particular items such as his belief that, "There is no reason to suppose that the clown and /Man-/ woman of the sword dance were ever thought to represent gods." See Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 204.

that the folk play and its stock characters appear to have had their origin in the witch cult does much to explain the form and meaning of the total folk theatre phenomenon, and of its persistently participating "grotesques," the Black Man, Hobby Horse, Man-Woman, Doctor and Fool as well.

In view of what has been said regarding the folk plays, it finally may be possible to understand more fully some facets of the late medieval Christian theatre. The cult identities or correspondences previously demonstrated provide new grounds which seem to affirm the possibility of a borrowing from the folk theatre by the Christian dramatic tradition. In this regard, Tiddy's conclusion was that

> the Morris fool, the Doctor's man, Beelzebub, the fool of the Mummers' play, the clown of the Sword Play, the devils of the Moralities and the Interludes are all, by dint of their mischief, or their black faces, or their fooling, ultimately one and the same.[5]

Chambers also remarked the similarity of Christian devils to a variety of the folk play characters, while the consistency with which these figures appeared as comic types on the Christian stage has been frequently noted by other scholars.[6] The fact that the devils of the Christian theatre were comic figures, however, is difficult to explain unless the folk plays are taken into account.

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[5]Tiddy, Mummers' Play, pp. 112-13.

[6]Chambers, Medieval Stage, I, 214; Gayley, Representative Comedies, p. 91; F. M. Salter, Medieval Drama in Chester (Toronto, 1955), p. 127; A. P. Rossiter, English Drama from Early Times to the Elizabethans (London, 1950), p. 90; Tiddy, Mummers' Play, p. 96; Allardyce Nicoll, Masks, Mimes and Miracles (London, 1931), pp. 187-92.

It seems logical to assume Christianity would have been careful to borrow only figures which suited its theologically instructive ends; in that respect, the black-faced Jack Dovil Dout and the Fool, Beelzebub, were clearly ideal. Well known and popular, they could have been relied upon to hold audience attention; while shorn of their traditional pagan rites, they could be exposed as figures of foolish impotence and unworthy of serious claim to godhead when juxtaposed with the massively impressive staging of the Christian message.

In order for the above borrowing and exploitation of the folk characters to have been successful, an ecclesiastical awareness of the pagan significance attaching to the figures would have been necessary. Such an awareness doubtlessly existed. While the effort expended in trying to mask the precise nature of the folk plays may have caused clerics to overlook certain of the characters' cult dimensions and dismiss others as innocuous vagaries of the rustic imagination, it is inconceivable that the Christian clergy could have mistaken the folk plays' massed reflections of the witch cult they had struggled against so long.

Christian objections to the folk play festivals tend to substantiate this position. It is possible, of course, to question whether the church, given the awareness postulated, would not have been more energetic in attempting to halt the pagan exhibitions. The answer seems to be that a frontal assault upon the widely popular folk theatrical institutions

had a greater potential for alienation than the Christian church wished or needed to risk:[7] it could have been more advantageous to undermine the source of the holiday, that is, to mount the attack against the increasingly anemic pagan cult itself.

Thus, there may be reason to suppose that the medieval Christian theatre borrowed its black-faced devils and masked Beelzebubs from the folk plays in full knowledge of their pagan connotations. Another such borrowing involved the Doctor who, as scholars have noted, appears in many of the Christian dramas.[8] With all his bragging and promised cures intact, the Doctor may seem a less likely character to adopt for the Christian purposes. It may be, however, that because the Doctor was the climactic focus of the folk play, his resurrective capacities constituted an effective summary of the old religion which had to be challenged. As in the case of its confrontation with many pagan institutions, the Christian church may have sought to avoid direct conflict, electing rather to absorb and gradually alter a tradition by taking advantage of the associations brought with it. For instances of this process, one has only to recall such

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[7]When prohibition occasionally was attempted, public resentment was fierce; in Edinburgh, in 1561, widespread armed civil insurrection resulted, and the authorities were forced to relent; see Gutch, Garlands, I, 361-62.

[8]Nicoll, Masks, pp. 186-87; Rossiter, English Drama, p. 65; Salter, Medieval Drama, pp. 45, 76-77.

dramas as the Croxton Play of the Sacrament, where the Doctor extols his own curative virtues as comically as ever, but is given no opportunity to effect a revival. Thus, his crowd-pleasing comic qualities would have been maintained for the Christian cause, and, in the boisterous fun, his final, crucial resurrective act could be quietly dropped.

A second possible way of absorbing the Doctor into the Christian tradition of theatre can be observed in plays like Abraham and Isaac and Everyman. Existing scholarship fails to provide an explanation for the fact that in these plays a character called the Doctor, unheralded and unmotivated, suddenly enters to supply a final Christian summary. This may again be accounted for as the absorptive and exploitive practice of Christian evangelism. In the play Everyman, for example, the Doctor enters just after Everyman has been saved by Good Deeds, and the promise of a new, eternal life is his. It is difficult to imagine a more convincing way to confirm this promise in the minds of the unconvinced or partly converted than to bring on the character most strongly identified with rebirth--the Doctor--and show him to be a part of the new resurrective pattern. Presented in this fashion, the Doctor offers proof of having deserted his old methods, while his very presence and words endorse the new beliefs. As he provides the final scene and speech of the play, therefore, the Doctor may be something more than an

example of unaccountable medieval whimsy; he may represent instead a calculated effort toward conversion or confirmation by the evangelizing Christian consciousness.

The point of view taken here is that the Doctor, a pagan figure derived from the witch cult and nurtured in the folk play, was adopted and used by the church as a tool for Christian conversion. In the light of that possibility, Salter's conclusion about the 1375 Chester cycle may be misleading. Salter says, "It is probable that a single long play was produced, for the appearance of the Doctor. . . in play after play of the late series suggests an original single work."[9] If the Doctor served as the kind of proselytising Christian tool described above, Salter's view becomes less convincing. The pagan figure would naturally have been exploited in many of the early plays which in the ordinary pattern of artistic development would have preceded later attempts to cohere all into a unified whole.

Nicoll's effort to present the Doctor and the Fool of Christian drama as characters with a classic origin is equally questionable. Apart from a single passing footnote,[10] Nicoll fails to take into account the existence of these figures in the English folk play. To find classical origins

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[9]Salter, Medieval Drama, p. 45. The omitted words are "or interpretor," which is Salter's term for the character. "Doctor," however, is the word employed consistently in the play scripts themselves.

[10]Nicoll, Masks, p. 26.

for these characters, as Nicoll does, may be ultimately possible, but the intermediate folk religious tradition is a much more probable and immediate source of the characters' derivation. Indeed, the same may be said for Chambers' argument concerning European and Balkan parallels to the English plays and stock characters.[11] An examination of the stock folk play figures not only provides repeated instances involving the characters whom Nicoll discusses, but it also furnishes a series of precedents which these corresponding characters in medieval Christian drama seem to have drawn upon--black faces, masks, bladders, clubs, names, irreverent fooling, the Doctor's bragging, his promised cures, the mere fact of his appearance in such plays as Everyman, and his persistent reappearance in the Chester cycle.

The preceding patterns are not the only ones in medieval Christian drama which appear to be indebted to the stock figures' habitual behavior. The admixture of the comic with the tragic, indeed, of low comedy with the sublime, has often been noted in the Christian cycle plays. The ultimately serious nature of the folk play may yield a prototype of that feature. As aspects of the cult god, the stock characters enacted their ritual assertion of life, but they contrived to infuse the occasion with the attractions of comedy as well. Christian theatre, borrowing folk play characters,

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[11]Chambers, English Folk Play, pp. 198-210.

may well have been influenced by folk play technique, thus making similar efforts to wed the serious with the comic statement.

A final case of folk influence upon the Christian stage may exist in the matter of character introductions, frequently a sore point among critics of medieval church dramaturgy. Salter is one who is thus dismayed, asserting, "It is certainly unskilled workmanship that lets the characters of the plays step before us and say, 'I am God,' 'I am Herod,' etc."[12] It is possible to maintain that this is an example less of unskilled workmanship than of injudicious borrowing. The folk play characters, it will be remembered, habitually introduced themselves in a similar way: "Here comes I, Beelzebub," or "Here come I, ain't been yit." In the folk plays, such an introduction would have sufficed the stock character--indeed, any more might just have been lost in the murmur and chuckle of welcoming recognition. When those folk characters were brought to the Christian stage, that abrupt kind of introduction could have continued to work well since the figures remained identifiable. With the example of the stock characters' simple but effective introductions before them, the makers of the Christian drama might at times have adopted the same device in a bid for the same effect. Matters such as this, then, indicate that

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[12]Salter, Medieval Drama, p. 105; see also Rossiter, English Drama, p. 62.

the English folk play contributed to the medieval Christian theatre through the influence of both its characters and its conventions.

More importantly, however, the basis for the tenacious and unaccountable popularity of the English folk play stock characters seems to become apparent when their roles are considered as aspects of the fertility cult god. To use C. L. Barber's apt phrase, they are a good example of "how the role precedes the character, how the larger rhythm of the whole action shapes and indeed creates the parts."[13] In the case of the English folk theatre, this role-shaping capacity of the underlying cult ritual allows a fuller comprehension of the folk play actor and his act.

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[13]C. L. Barber, "Saturnalian Patterns in Shakespearean Comedy," The Sewanee Review, LIX, no. 4 (Autumn, 1951), 611.

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Stephen Durboraw Malin was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on December 20, 1932, attended the public schools of York, Pennsylvania, and went on to Gettysburg College and the Pennsylvania State University, receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree from the latter institution in 1957. He has pursued graduate work at the University of Florida where he was awarded the Master of Arts degree in 1962.

In addition to teaching for eight years, the writer has been employed as an actor in a number of stock theatres, has engaged in a rich variety of subsistence employment situations, and was two years in the United States Army. He has had several critical articles published, and his poetry continues to appear in a variety of quarterly reviews. He has been employed as Assistant Professor of Speech and Drama at the Memphis State University in Memphis, Tennessee, since 1964. Of his associations, institutional or personal, he is most pleased with his wife, Joanne, and their daughter, Lesley.

This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

August, 1968

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